

BERENICE.

BY MISS L. A.

"Why am I here? here in this dull, dark room? The windows are barred on the outside with iron. Fools! they think I am mad, I know. I can feel them, even though my back is turned, point their fingers at me, and smile to one another; and then I turn upon them suddenly and suspiciously. How they cower before my look! I like it, and I laugh till the walls laugh back again. Then they tremble, and whisper together softly with white lips, and move cautiously out at the door. I hear the bolt click on the outside, and I am alone, — alone except when he is here. And he comes so silently, and never speaks, — only watches me with steady, reproachful eyes, till I grow cold, cold, and my heart stands still with a terrible fear. But I am *not* mad; only frightened a little, and sad, very sad, and tired. Sometimes at night, when the strong surges of the south-wind sweep against the windows with a sound of the sea, and then fade away, away, with their faint, hissing laugh, I dream that I am standing on the shore, and that this terrible tumultuous agony

that throbs in my heart loses itself in the mightier misery of the sea; and for a moment I am at rest. The dull light of the morning steals across my eyes, and the spell is broken.

"Where is it? The tiny stiletto that I wore. My fingers wander restlessly over my neck in search of the cord that held it. It was a pretty toy, — there were jewels in the handle, bright, glittering jewels. Ah! I remember they took it when they brought me here. But what matter? *We shall* outwit them yet, — I and Death. Do you see this bracelet? Lift it. How broad and heavy it is! One would believe it solid, but it is not; it is hollow. See! The cameo flies back when I touch this spring. Within are two vials. They contain *aqua tef-fana*.

"And yet the thought haunts me that I am already dead. *This* cannot be life, — this weary existence, where the days and the weeks lose themselves in the years, leaving no sign that they have been. Do you know, can you tell, how it is? Bere-

nice, Berenice Howard! The names do not combine well. The pride of the Howards received a terrible blow when a son of their house married the favorite *danseuse* of the — Theatre, — a woman in whose veins flowed the blood of princes, the Romany blood, pure as their own, and older by untold centuries. Of course this terrible *mesalliance* separated my father from his family.

"We lived at the South. I was very young when my mother died. I did not understand death. I knew only that a sudden gloom settled upon the household, a haunting, appalling stillness. I wandered about the house lonely and unnoticed.

"Where is mamma?" I questioned of the housekeeper.

"She answered me with an unwonted tenderness in her voice. 'Mamma has gone away, dear.'

"When will she come home again?"

"Not yet: not in a long time."

"That night I sobbed myself to sleep from sheer loneliness. It must have been at midnight that I woke suddenly, chilled, and trembling with the terror of an ill-defined dream. I sprang from my bed, and listened eagerly, gazing the while with fear-distended eyes into every corner of the many-recessed room. The weird twilight of the waning moon made for me only motionless shadows. The intense silence was appalling. I stepped outside into the dimly lighted hall. There was the same dead quiet. I walked the length of the hall, shivering in the damp draughts of the night air, fearing to go forward, fearing still more to turn back. Even now memory recalls the sound made by my bare feet as I walked.

"Presently I stopped opposite a partly opened door. A warm blaze of light came out to give me greeting. From within came a sound as of some one breathing heavily in sleep. I peered cautiously into the mysterious apartment, and saw only the wall on one side, and the light shining on the carpet. Should I inquire further? Childish curiosity overcame fear. I moved forward boldly, and stood inside the door.

"It was a chamber which perhaps I had seen before, perhaps I have seen since, but remember only for that once. The two high, arched windows were framed in some dark wood, and slightly recessed. The high-posted bedstead of black walnut, studded

with brass nails, had been pushed out from its accustomed corner toward the centre of the room. Its heavy draperies of blue and silver were looped back, so I could see that there was a lady lying upon the bed wearing a dress of white silk, a bridal dress. At her head and feet burned a row of candles. In front of the bed, but some distance from it, sat a withered old woman. She was sleeping: her head fell forward upon her breast, and two long, widely separated teeth showed in her half-open mouth. Opposite to her sat a younger woman, one of our own negroes. She, too, slept.

"I went noiselessly across the room to see who lay upon the bed. A cloth was spread over the face. I lifted it carefully, and found — my mother! I kissed the still, beautiful face again and again. How cold it was! The cloth had been placed over it to keep it warm, I thought, and I carefully re-arranged it. I wondered a little at the dress my mother wore; then climbed upon the bed, nestled close beside her, covered myself with the folds of the white silk, and in a few moments fell asleep.

"I awoke in my father's arms. He was carrying me across the hall back to my own room. It was broad day, and, child that I was, I noticed how pale and sorrowful his face had grown. I never saw my mother again from that time; but my father regarded me with a new tenderness, and for years that followed I was his first thought, his first care, his absorbing love. Ah me! the happiness of those years! the dreary, dreary want of them through all my after-life!

"During my father's last illness, he became reconciled with a younger brother living in Boston, and confided me to his consideration. Never shall I forget the chill that crept over me when I stood for the first time in the presence of my aunt and my cousin Mary. How vividly rises the recollection of the large, gloomily elegant dining-room, darkened to a dreary twilight by the heavy crimson curtains; of the cold fingertips that touched mine, and the cold voice that ordered the servant to show Miss Howard to her room. It was a fair promise of the life that was to be mine, — a life that, compared to the one which had been mine, was as the cold, damp darkness of the dungeon to the broad, free, happy sunshine. With me to love and be loved was life. I

had the warm impulses of my mother's nature. If I could not be loved, I would be content to love. But every timid advance that I made to my aunt or cousin was repulsed with an aversion too marked to be misunderstood. I came and went in the house as I chose. I was neglected and ignored; and, had it not been for my uncle, who, mindful of his promise to my father, inquired for me every day, I believe I should have been utterly forgotten.

"Lonely, homesick, and depressed, I dragged on a miserable existence. The slow months of the winter wore away, and with the spring came Clarence Howard, the son of my father's eldest brother. It was thought expedient that he should marry my cousin Mary, that the Howard property might not become too much diminished by division. On the day of his arrival, passing through the hall by the open door of the drawing-room, I heard him question, —

"So, is that *La Senorita*?"

"Yes," said the voice of my cousin Mary.

"Not startlingly handsome. Much fire?"

"No," said Mary, with a sneering laugh. "Mamma and I feared some trouble, but she is easily kept down."

"After Clarence Howard's arrival, my life became even more intolerable than before. Every day I lived less. I seemed to move like one in a strange dream, conscious of a great suffering, striving, striving to break the spell of icy horror that paralyzed every faculty of mind and body.

"When Clarence had been some weeks with us, my aunt decided to open her house to her friends for a grand evening entertainment. The important occasion arrived. Nothing had been said to me in regard to my toilet. I selected, however, a dress that I considered sufficiently pretty, put it on, and, after the guests began to arrive, descended to the drawing-room. I entered the room with some timidity. My aunt and cousin were engaged at the further end of the room. Clarence alone saw me, but noticed me only with an expression of surprise and disapproval. I crossed the floor, greeted on every side by looks of surprise and inquiry, and seated myself in an obscure corner. The guests promenaded and danced, and amused themselves in groups. But no one came to me, or took pains to have me presented to them. At last I could endure it no longer. I slipped from the

room as quietly as I could, and ran softly up the stairs to my own chamber. The house had become intolerable to me. Seizing a shawl, I ran quickly down the stairs, through the halls, and out of the door, which stood partly open, unobserved.

"Once in the street, I felt a sense of relief and freedom. The heavens were full of stars, and it would have been light without the aid of the street-lamps. I rushed wildly forward, — I almost ran, — turning here and there, until I found myself in the lower part of Cambridge Street. Still I kept on, on, on, until at last I stood upon the bridge, listening to the cool, ceaseless flow of the water beneath it. By this time the moon had risen, and its reflection lay in a broad column of light upon the river. I leaned against the railing, and looked at the swift current. How the tiny ripples beckoned and beckoned as the resistless tide swept on to the wild sea! More and more intense grew its fascination as I gazed. Suddenly, overcome by an irresistible longing, I stretched out my arms toward it. A heavy hand fell upon my shoulder.

"Not yet! your time is not yet," said a voice close to my ear.

"Angry and frightened, I drew back, and, turning, faced the man who had spoken.

"You have nothing to fear. It is a friend who speaks to you," he said. And then, uncovering his head, and standing so that the moonlight fell full upon his face, he continued, —

"Look at me, Berenice Howard, and say if we have not met before."

"Something in his face was strangely familiar. Where had I seen it? I covered my eyes with my hand, and then came to me a vision of my childhood. I was playing with a group of children in the street. A gentleman passing noticed us, stopped, lifted me in his arms, and kissed me. I was frightened, and struggled to get away from him. He put me again upon the ground, walked forward a few steps slowly, turned back, and handed me a small gold coin, bidding me keep it in remembrance of him. It was a Spanish coin, and I still kept it. That very night I had noticed it in my jewel-casket.

"Yes," I answered slowly: "yes, I remember."

"One question more. Have you not in your possession a miniature like this?"

"I gazed long at the exquisite little

painting he placed in my hand, and for the first time for many weeks tears filled my eyes.

"Well?"

"It is my mother's face."

"And my sister's. After this, will you trust me?"

"Yes," I replied unhesitatingly, placing both my hands in his.

"Entirely?"

"Yes. Why should I fear you? Nothing can make me more miserable than I already am."

"Come, then," he said, drawing my arm through his. "You must get home before the festivities are at an end, or you cannot enter the house without attracting attention."

"How did you, how could you, know what was going on at the house?" I asked, in astonishment.

"Know!" he said, his voice vibrant with feeling. "Have I not watched you day by day since you came to live under that roof? Have I not seen your face grow always more pale and sad? Have I not followed you on your long, lonely walks? Have I not marked the slightest events of your daily life? Had you been happy, I would have been content. But now"—His eyes dilated, his face wore the look of a fiend. "I—we will revenge upon them your mother's wrongs and your own."

"What change came over me as he spoke! I believed no longer my own insignificance. I became again myself. The cloud that had overshadowed me lifted itself suddenly. I felt free, free, free. Hatred for the people who had wronged me so cruelly took in my heart the place of the love I might have given them,—hatred intense and terrible.

"Why must I return to them at all?" I said passionately. "I hate them. Their very presence suffocates me."

"Softly. You forget the appearance must be consulted. No shadow of scandal must rest upon your fair name. And," added he, more to himself than to me, "one may accomplish an incalculable amount of evil under cover of a good name."

"It was not quite midnight when I reached the house. The halls and different apartments were flooded with light. Subtle perfumes penetrated the atmosphere that palpitated to the dreamy music of an exquisite waltz. I passed the open door of the drawing-room unnoticed, catching a

vision of light dresses, and the murmur of suppressed voices. I climbed the stairs to my own little chamber. There was no light there. All was gloomy, chill, and desolate. As I stood thus alone, the old dead weight of suffering returned, more terrible, more maddening, for the short respite I had experienced. What could I do? My heart seemed to stand still. I was suffocating. I pushed my hair away from my face, and walked back and forth across the room with impetuous, irregular steps. Sob after sob burst from my lips, shaking my whole body. My limbs refused to support me. I threw myself upon the bed utterly unable to control the violence of my passion. At last tears—the first I had shed since I entered the house—filled my eyes. Not the tears that bring relief, but tears such as one sheds not often in a lifetime,—hot, bitter, terrible tears, wrung from the heart by a stern agony; tears that quicken the pulses and make the brain throb.

"Long, long after the last guest had left the house, and all sounds of the festivities were hushed, I fell into a deep sleep. It was late the next morning when I awoke, with that consciousness of complete happiness always produced by the sleep that follows utter physical exhaustion. But in a moment all my troubles were poured into my mind again; not, however, with the old intensity; they seemed less a part of myself. I looked at them from the outside, and saw for the first time how cruelly I had been treated. I grew indignant, angry; the hot blood of my mother throbbed in my veins, and, crossing my hands, I vowed by the gods of her people that I would follow my tormentors with a vengeance as frightful as had been my own suffering. Passing the mirror by chance, I caught sight of the reflection of my face. I had new color, and a dangerous fire blazed in my eyes. The transformation pleased me. I think the whole family felt the change when I entered the breakfast-room. Clarence was first to notice it.

"*La Senorita* is on fire this morning," he said in a low voice to my cousin Mary.

"But his sneer did not hurt me now, I should so soon be independent of it.

"I have no very clear recollection of the events that followed. My newly found relative came to the house to see me, and after some time it was arranged that I should be permitted to travel with him for some

years. I believe too, that, finding there was no one person in the world who really cared for me, my uncle's family began to think I might possibly be of some importance. At least they treated me with more consideration; and the last days of my stay with them were rendered tolerable.

"Two years were spent in travel and study in England. Two were given to Germany and Paris, where I learned fencing and the use of the pistol. And at last came Spain, — Spain, where my warm passions found sympathy in nature; where I felt myself at home. Here life wore again for me its brightest charms: it was a renewal of my early years of happiness. Existence was a gorgeous dream in which I could have been content to linger forever. Not so my uncle. He did not forget or fail to remind me of the unaccomplished revenge that awaited its fulfillment on the other side of the Atlantic.

"My dream-life came to an end. We returned to the United States, and made our residence in the city of New York. Mary and Clarence, who had been for some time married and living in the same city, begged me to count their house as one of my homes. I could not be entirely separated from my uncle, but it suited my purpose to spend a part of my time with them. I had left them an overgrown, awkward girl of fifteen. I returned to them a superbly beautiful woman, accomplished both by travel and study.

"My cousin Mary was a weak, jealous, vain woman. I comprehended her perfectly. I outshone her in every way. Living in the same house a part of the time, meeting constantly in society, it was an easy matter for me to torture her in a thousand ways. I kept her in a perpetual state of irritation. I excited her to the nearest approach to rage that her weak nature could reach. Secure in my own superiority, I could meet her most energetic efforts at retaliation with a cool disdain, which served to drive her to more frantic but equally futile endeavors.

"The strongest point in my game was the influence I began to acquire over my cousin Clarence. Love for him was the leading impulse of Mary's life. To her he was without an equal; and she valued the indifferent regard which he bestowed upon her before all else in the world. This I purposed to take away from her. I had stepped

easily between her and every petty society triumph for which she had striven. I had out-dressed, out-danced, out-talked, out-sung, out-flirted, and out-charitied her; but I reserved the alienation of his love for the dainty culmination of my revenge. I worked slowly at this last purpose, and every advance gained gave me the keenest enjoyment. It was more difficult to accomplish than any purpose I had yet undertaken, and the difficulties gave to it a new zest. I had grown weary of too easy triumphs. There was a touch of honor in Clarence Howard's character. Why should there not be? He had 'the blood of all the Howards.' He repelled my first advances with an almost brutal contempt. When I was at his house, he staid away from it for days. He treated me constantly with marked rudeness, and in this way Mary found a passing compensation for my former successes. Firm in my determination, I endured with apparent lack of comprehension. The moment that I awaited came. Clarence, in crossing the street, was struck and thrown down by a runaway horse, and so severely bruised that he was obliged to remain for some days in the house. He was passionately fond of music. In the long twilights, I sang to him, — not as he had heard me sing in crowded rooms, but with tenderness and pathos, and with all the magnetic force of expression of which I was capable. On the third evening, he joined me in a duet. His own voice had never sounded so well to him, I intoned mine to such perfect harmony with it. From that moment my conquest was secure. He came to love me madly, blindly, unreasonably. He took no pains to conceal his devotion to me. It was remarked by every one. Ah, how I tortured my poor Mary! She could endure no longer. She became violently ill. One evening in the late spring, Clarence and I sat together in the music-room. It was unusually warm. The sash of the window was slightly opened. The treacherous softness of the night blew into the room, stirring the perfumes from the basket of flowers on the table. A strange hush pervaded the house. We two had sat for a long time silent. Suddenly there was a disturbance in the rooms above, a hurried moving hither and thither, and then the door of the music-room was opened, and the voice of the physician who had attended Mary spoke Clarence's name.

"'Mr. Howard,' he said, 'there has been an unexpected — to me an unaccountable — change in your wife's condition. I fear the worst for her.'

"'I will go to her,' said Clarence.

"The physician withdrew. With hasty steps, Clarence crossed the floor, and stood before me.

"'Berenice, Berenice, I shall be free,' he said under his breath.

"'Clarence,' I said softly as he was leaving the room.

"He turned eagerly, and would have taken my hands, but I repelled him haughtily.

"'Know this, Clarence Howard,' I said. 'Your freedom matters little to me. From my soul I hate you.'

"That night I left Clarence Howard's house: the object of my stay in it had been accomplished. I joined my uncle at his hotel. We remained some time in the city waiting to hear news of Mary. She did not die. It was said that her husband's devotion had restored her to health. From whatever cause, her recovery was sure. The appearance was kept in their favor. In the eyes of the world, Mr. Howard was all that a husband should be; Mrs. Howard as superlatively happy as the wife of such a man ought to be. After all, there was still something to be done.

"In the summer, I sailed for Europe, to remain away, I caused it to be understood, for years: in reality to return in the autumn, in a new character, — that of the young Count di Cenci.

"Handsome, dashing, wealthy, noble, I was received everywhere with eagerness. Mamas maneuvered to secure my attendance at their receptions. Daughters stood ready to sink into my arms, and accept my coronet and my seal-ring. Papas frowned upon me, and regarded me with suspicious eyes. I amused myself here, there, and everywhere as I would.

"At a grand entertainment, I was presented to Mrs. Clarence Howard. For the rest of the season, I was her devoted admirer. I knew her weak points by heart. If I could induce her to believe that she really attracted me, despite the thousand allurements held out to me in other directions, I should have a sure and strong hold upon her vanity. In every way I exerted myself to charm her. My manner was in perfect contrast to that of her husband. I

studied her moods, I anticipated her wishes; I was entertaining, brilliant, or pensive by turns. I professed to live only in her presence. Even her weak soul — too weak to be wicked from its own impulse — was stirred into a semblance of passion by my devotion. She consented to elope with me. The arrangements were all made. The time for our flight appointed. It had been my habit to frequent the club of which Clarence Howard was a member. One evening I entered the rooms somewhat late. From the first, I had repelled Howard's friendly advances, refusing to acknowledge him except by the most distant politeness. But that night, when he approached me, and, filling his own glass, pointed to mine, I accepted the courtesy.

"'Why not?' I said with an insolent laugh. 'I can afford it, since your wife has acknowledged her preference for me.'

"The glass fell from his hand, and lay a heap of glittering fragments on the carpet at his feet. Seizing the light cane it was his habit to carry, he struck me across the cheek, a sharp, stinging blow that the blood answered. You can see the scar from the cut now. I was never unarmed. I drew from its hiding-place the small pistol which was always my companion. We were very near each other, Clarence Howard and I. My hand was steady. The fatal ball shot straight to its mark. Clarence fell. Unheeding the horror-struck group that gathered about us, I knelt beside him. I took my cap from my head, allowing my hair to fall about my face. I bent my face above his.

"'Clarence,' I said softly, but in my natural voice.

"A gleam of recognition shone in his eyes.

"'Berenice,' he whispered huskily.

"'Ay, Berenice,' I said with an exultant laugh.

"He turned his face from me with a gesture of aversion.

"I held my hand to catch the blood that trickled slowly from his wound. I sprinkled the drops in his face, pronouncing the malediction I had learned from my mother's people. Then I stood watching eagerly the cold, white shadows creep over the face, till the eyes glazed, the mouth dropped apart, and Clarence Howard lay at my feet — dead.

"Then I uttered one long, wild shriek,

the exultant outburst of my fiendish triumph. With the savage strength of a tiger, pushing aside the men who sought to detain me, I rushed from the room, from the house, out into the street under the starlight. Screaming with exultation, I ran on and on and on. I think I must have struck some obstacle. A frightful pain passed through my head. An intense, chill darkness enveloped me.

“When I woke out of the darkness, I was here in these dreary rooms, and here the long years that followed have dragged their weary course.

“Only Clarence, the one guest that I would keep away, haunts me always, always. My brain throbs and aches, I am so tired, so unutterably weary with this long misery. Will it never end?”

BERT'S GLOVES.

BY ESTHER SERLE KENNETH.

They were my brother's gloves,—of thick, dark kid, lined with white wool, and trimmed with a fine foreign fur; handsome things of the kind; and on the morning that he went abroad he had forgotten them, and left them in my parlor. I put them in my writing-desk, as a sort of keepsake. The owner went far from me; sailed over many seas, visited ancient cities, lived a life utterly apart from mine for nearly ten years.

It was strange, because Bert had so long been sunshine and strength to me. I used to sing Leigh Hunt's old rhyme,—

"Say I'm old and gray and sad,
Say that health and strength have missed
me,
Say I'm poor, but also add,
Bertie kissed me!"

Of course I was glad of his honorable appointment, and of the privileges of his foreign tour; but it was a sore trial to have him leave me, and for a year I missed him terribly. I was a rich woman, but without youth or health, living alone with my servants in the city, because I liked city life, and Bert had been much my escort and companion. He had his gay girl friends and his club associates, but my parlor was his invariable early evening resort. If he gave me an hour of petting and gay gossip, I did not care that he spent the next half-dozen with the belle of a ball-room or in the library of some gray *savant*, for Bert was wise as well as witty. He had hundreds of acquaintances whom I did not know. And I think they all valued him, more or less, as I did.

Before he went to Paris, he said,—

"Philippa, while I am gone, you had better have a companion."

"Whom? Another old maid to compare her doldrums with mine?"

"No: a young maid, without a care or a trouble in the whole world,—little Hilarie Gray."

"Why, she's a mere child. Bert, if you mean Miser Gray's grand-daughter."

"The same. She's a bright little thing, and it's a pity to have her entombed in that old sepulchre of a house where her grandsire lives. Nobody takes care of her or teaches her anything, I suppose; though she's the old man's heiress probably. Take her up, Philippa: she needs a friend, and you need a plaything. I assure you she's worth while; has the most magnificent bronze-brown eyes I ever saw, and you must teach her how to use them."

"She won't need eyes or youth or brightness, to get a husband, with a fortune of a hundred thousand dollars."

"Two hundred thousand, if reports are true regarding her grandfather's wealth," he said.

"You might wait for her, Bert."

"She's but thirteen. Could n't think of it."

"Suppose I like her, would her grandfather let her come here?"

"Yes. I don't suppose the old dotard knows where she is half the time. To tell the truth, I sounded him on the subject yesterday; and—well, actually, I think he considers her board for the next five years an object."

I laughed, this was so characteristic of the old banker whose penuriousness had gained him the appellation of "miser." I was touched, too, to understand how Bert had realized my loneliness, and tried to alleviate it. But I made him no promises,

and it was many days after his departure before I thought again of Hilarie Gray.

But one day, after I had heard a sermon on charity which stirred up the benevolence of my nature, I bethought me of the child whom I had never seen. I began to entertain the idea that perhaps I could do her some good, though I had no thought that she could do me any. I reminded myself of the great, gloomy stone house where she lived in the suburbs, and considered it probable that my sunny suite of rooms in the heart of the city, frequented by authors, artists, and the *elite* of general society, would be very enjoyable to a young girl reared in convent-like seclusion. Perhaps she was fond of music, would appreciate the opera, the theatre, the picture galleries, — pleasures that sometimes palled upon me, so that I was less fortunate than a fresh, ignorant girl. I was proverbially hard to please in matters of art. But it might be enjoyable, perhaps, to witness the delight of one more easily gratified; and it was with almost eager anticipation that I ordered my carriage, and drove out to Hillsdale.

Such a shy, beautiful, bright thing! more a woman than I had thought her, and radiant with delight at the idea of coming to the Templeton House with me. The old skinflint, her grandfather, looked at me with his bleary eyes, and wondered what I could want of Hilarie.

"It costs a deal to keep a growing child," he said warningly.

"Perhaps I can afford her support better than you can," I answered.

"No doubt you can, no doubt," he replied; for nothing pleased him better than to conceal his wealth.

Then, turning to his grand-daughter, he said, —

"Well, go, Hilarie, go; and don't wear out your clothes too fast or eat too much."

She turned her laughing eyes on me, as much amused as I at the old man's foibles, and left the room to make her few simple preparations for departure.

She had taken no blight from the mouldy old place. She was more simple and unspoiled than most young girls, and far sunnier.

Her fairy-like brightness made her a favorite with my set. Of course the heiress of the rich old banker was not patronized, though the unworlly child was grateful for every courtesy shown her. The fault of

her nature, if she had one, was a lack of personal pride. She had little confidence in herself, and could be easily bent to any stronger will.

Yet there was a gentle self-reliance about her that pleased me. Though I had assumed the care of her, physically and spiritually, she was never a burden to me. When it was my mood to withdraw within myself, as it often was, Hilarie would entertain herself, still as happy as a bird; and often her sweetness would win me from my sadness and forebodings. She was so sympathetic! And her delight often exceeded mine when the postman brought a letter from Bert, full of news and good cheer. If I were really ill, never was such a darling little nurse. She was balm for body and soul.

I think the child loved me. I am sure I loved her with a warmth and strength which I sometimes wondered at. Her sincerity and simplicity as well as her affection came to be a rest and support to my world-weary spirit. I used to spend whole evenings lying on a sofa, my aching head resting on her little lap, her soft hands stroking my forehead, while I listened to her pleasant prattle of the past, — her grandfather's odd ways, the old garden, her books; or of the present, whereof her ingenious criticisms on society greatly amused me.

But three years went by, and Hilarie was a woman; and the young men, as well as the old women, found her delightful. At sixteen, I think the girl was perfectly beautiful. I did not wonder that I became so popular with gentlemen as a means of making Hilarie's acquaintance. But, since her marriage was a serious thing, I used to wonder if I ought not to return her to her grandfather's care. If she formed an attachment which was not pleasing to him, I should perhaps be considered more or less responsible for very grave consequences. But I could not get my own consent to let her go; and I temporized the matter by resting on the fact that Hilarie as yet showed no preferences.

I think she would have been overcome with grief had I sent her from me to reside at Hillsdale alone with her grandfather. He had never won her heart; and, her parents having died in her infancy, I was, she used to say, the only person she had ever loved.

At this period of her life, I know she was perfectly happy.

Suddenly, without any warning, the mischief I wished to avoid was done.

Harry Walbridge won her love. I was unprepared for this, because he was very young, hardly one-and-twenty, and of that gay, mercurial temper she had never seemed to find congenial, choosing her friends from among those older and wiser than herself. But "gay youth loves gay youth," and they were a happy pair of playfellows. I thought the matter might rest safely there for a while; for Harry was still at college, and his future unsettled.

But in three months he had graduated, and talked of marriage.

I sent him to Hilarie's grandfather.

The next day I received a letter by one of the old banker's servants, written in a trembling hand, saying that he disapproved entirely of Mr. Harry Walbridge, and requiring that Hilarie be sent home to him immediately.

In the evening, Harry came.

"The pig headed old dotard! He has nothing against me but a quarrel with my father forty years ago. He forbids me to see Hilarie. Is n't that rough on a fellow, though?"

It was hard; but I knew of nothing that I could do. I feared that the morose old banker would treat me, not only harshly, but rudely, if I attempted an interview with him; and indeed I knew of nothing that I could say which would improve matters.

Of course Harry had interviews with Hilarie while she remained with me; but in two days she removed to Hillsdale.

She went, her beautiful eyes swollen with weeping; and it was like turning her back on all she enjoyed, and going to prison. Old legends read in the musty library, the trumpet-flowers over the broken arbors, and the tame animals at Hillsdale were no longer sufficient for her, as they had been in her childhood's days.

Of course I missed the girl's bright presence sadly; but I had often warned myself that I could not keep her always, and so I was somewhat prepared to lose her.

The old man had separated the lovers, but he could not keep them apart. Hilarie never came to see me, that Harry was not at the house as soon as she; and, when I went down to the seashore in August, Hilarie begged leave to accompany me, and Harry, too, was there.

It was late on a cold November evening,

after our return, that a carriage stopped at the door of Templeton House, and a moment later Harry and Hilarie were in my arms.

They were just married, and both were pale as young ghosts with excitement.

"We are a runaway couple, of course," said Harry, "and are on our way to my father's. I took Hilarie up at the garden gate at Hillsdale. Pray give her an extra shawl, or she will freeze before we get to Marshfield. It has turned out a dreadfully cold night."

"And you too, Harry,—do you want nothing?" I asked, when I had wrapped Hilarie warmly.

"Have you a pair of thick gloves?" he asked. "I am going to drive out home."

I brought Bert's gloves from my desk, and gave them to him. Hilarie kissed and clung to me, shivering, as if some apprehension of what was to follow was then upon her. I held her to my breast until the last moment, and then bade God bless them, when they went out into the dark, cold night.

A week later, in my morning paper, I read of the terrible accident which befell them.

On the day following their marriage, they had been arranging the rooms assigned to their use. In the centre of the little parlor a heavy bronze chandelier was hung. The ornament had been insufficiently secured, or the moving of the piano and heavy furniture had loosened it; for, as they stood beneath, it had fallen, and felled them both to the floor. Hilarie had received only a slight flesh-wound upon the shoulder, but Harry was fatally injured upon the head.

I learned afterward that Hilarie had sent for me before he died; but the note had miscarried, and never reached me.

As soon as I received the news, I went immediately to Marshfield, and with some difficulty found Hilarie's residence. She was ill from the effects of the shock and grief, and, lifting her fevered face and heavy eyes from the pillow, scarcely knew me.

Harry had been buried that morning.

As soon as she was a little recovered, she begged to come home with me; and, after these many changes, Hilarie was again in my parlors, sinking down as if it were the only place on earth where she could find peace.

A letter was remailed to her from her grandfather, — sent by Harry's father.

A few harsh words. He was ill. He hoped she would not force her presence upon him, as he did not wish to see her. He wished he had died before he had learned of the disgrace she had brought upon him. He hoped she would retreat with her paramour to some distant part of the country, that he might not be troubled again with her while he lived.

Poor Hilarie! She had grown pale and thin and wild-eyed. I dreaded the effect of this cruel note upon her, — for I ran it through first, as I sat by her side, at her request.

"What is it?" she asked, lifting her pallid face from the sofa where she lay, watching my countenance. I was forced to give her the sheet.

The wicked old man, out of the memories of his own dissolute youth, had seemed to see only guilt in her elopement. I understood this from his letter. She did not: perhaps she did not read it carefully. She dropped it with a long pained sigh, and silently turned away her face.

"He was always either unkind or indifferent. I did not expect much else," she said, after a few moments.

I picked up the letter, and concealed it.

Hilarie remained with me six months. Then she said that she wished to conciliate her grandfather if possible. I understood. It was for the sake of the little one coming to her.

I took her in my carriage to Hillsdale.

I kept close by her side as we went into the musty old library where her grandfather sat. He started up, and peered at her closely.

"Married you call yourself, eh?" he said to her first few gentle words. "Where is your marriage certificate?"

She looked from him to me blankly.

"Certificate?" she repeated.

"Yes: there must have been one, dear. You should have brought it," I said.

"I did not see any," she murmured.

The old man laughed sardonically.

"Harry must have had one of course," I said assuringly as I noted her look of alarm. "Don't trouble your niece about the matter, I beg of you, Mr. Gray, for she is not strong. The certificate shall be found, and submitted to your inspection."

"I should like to see it, — I should like

to see it, of course," he replied, with most disagreeable inflection. "But, in case it is difficult to find it, I shall not be surprised. I know the blood Harry Walbridge came of: it is bad blood. But, since you connived at her running away with him, Miss Philippa Redlowe, perhaps you will like to leave your money to his child."

Hilarie's cheek flushed with anger, for she loved Harry tenderly, but she did not speak for a moment. The pale, troubled look came back to her face.

"Auntie," she said to me, "what is a marriage certificate?"

I explained.

"There was one, I remember now, but I do not know where it is."

After a moment she turned to her grandfather.

"Grandfather," she said, earnestly, "I do not want you to leave any money to Harry's child. If you dislike Harry, I had far rather you would not. But I came to you because I am homeless but for Miss Redlowe's kindness, and I thought the birth of my child should take place here. But I cannot beg you to take me back, and now I cannot bring myself to stay, even if you requested it. I — oh! my heart is breaking!"

She clasped her hands across her breast, and I think would have fallen to the floor but that I caught her. Such utter grief as swept over her I never witnessed. I could do nothing but support and fondle her, and this I did fearlessly. The cruelty of even that hard old man seemed arrested. He rang for a glass of water for her, and, when we rose to depart, sent a servant with us to the carriage.

Of course I kept Hilarie with me. She knew she was welcome. And when, in the autumn, her little boy was born, he too was welcome.

He was a sunny little creature. His mother's sadness and tears had no effect on the tiny laughing creature, who soon grew into the sturdiest of little toddlers, filling my quiet rooms with his clatter and merry shouts. He drew Hilarie from her melancholy to an enjoyment of life again, and once more we two were happy together.

Loving Hilarie as I did, I longed to see her righted. With this end in view, I took counsel with my lawyer, Mr. Westerly, who was also Mr. Gray's lawyer, and I think it was partly owing to his influence that we at length gained the day.

For Hilarie's marriage certificate was not to be found, and her grandfather died without seeing her again during his life.

Of course we searched everywhere for the certificate. I went with Hilarie to Marshfield, and we brought away many tokens of Harry, though not the valued paper. Among other things, Hilarie found Bert's gloves, which Harry had borrowed on that eventful night, and returned them to me with a sob.

"We will keep them together, dear," I said.

Our search being unsuccessful, we returned to the city; and months grew into years, and brought us few more changes until old Mr. Gray died.

His will read to this effect:—

If Hilarie's marriage was proved valid, the bulk of his fortune was settled upon her. If not, it was to be used for the benefit of a certain society which he had founded. Five years was the time allotted in which to decide the matter.

Though her claims as an heiress had diminished, new suitors poured around Hilarie, who was more beautiful as a woman than she had been as a girl. It was her mind as well as her person which was now so attractive that men and women alike admired and courted her. And again I forced myself to entertain the thought that she would some time be taken from me. I scrutinized her gallants criticisingly, hoping her second choice might please me, yet fearing that it would not.

Hilarie and I were sitting together one day,—I embroidering a scarf with Parma violets for little Hal, and Hilarie cutting the leaves of a new magazine preparatory to reading aloud to me,—when the door opened, and a gentleman on the threshold took off his hat.

A dark, thin face, full of sunshine, a bold forehead, piercing eyes. I don't know why I was so obtuse. It was Hilarie who, rising and beaming with sympathetic delight, said,—

"Mr. Redglowe."

"What?" I cried.

"It is Bert," said Hilarie.

I jumped up like a school-girl, and ran to hug him. He caught me in his arms, and, Hilarie says, waltzed around the room with me.

When we were over the first excitement, and could sit down and behave like rational

creatures, Hilarie would have stolen away, and left Bert and I to quiet conversation, but he gently detained her.

"Do not try to make a stranger of yourself," he said. "Do you not know it was I who first brought Philippa and you together?"

"Then you did me the greatest service of my life," she answered.

She remained a while longer. But when Hal called her, and she left the room, Bert said,—

"I never saw a woman so perfectly lovely in my life."

Of course my letters to him had contained all of Hilarie's history, and one had never arrived from him which I had not read to her. So they were prepared, being what they were, to like each other.

To love each other, soon. I cannot say with what utter delight I saw my brother's eyes flash with rapture at the mention of her name, while her beautiful face grew radiant at his approach. It is true her young heart had once been given to Harry Walbridge, but all her noble being was included in her love for Bertram.

"I am so happy! You and Hilarie will some day be married," I said.

"God willing," he responded.

And, when I talked with Hilarie, she said,—

"My happiness frightens me."

They were in *no great haste* to marry, being contented with the present. But during the bright months Hilarie one day confided to me her unconquerable sorrow that her marriage certificate could nowhere be found.

"Bert is not rich. We do not want to be a burden to him,—Hal and I" (for Bert had offered to adopt the boy, giving him his name); "and I should so like to bring him the fortune that my grandfather left."

"You a burden to Bert, Hilarie! Do not let him hear you say that. He will be sincerely hurt."

"But I should so like the money for his sake," she responded.

But I had warned her, and she did not mention the subject to him, at least not as she had spoken to me.

Their wedding-day was set at last. Bert had purchased a lovely *chalet* ten miles from the city. We had all been busy for a fortnight in arranging and furnishing it, constantly driving in town and out, and fit-

ting up the most exquisite little home imaginable. But at times I saw the cloud on Hilarie's brow.

If Bert saw it, he thought she was tired; and no tenderness or devotion I ever witnessed exceeded his.

At last the wedding morning came, and they were married at my rooms, where Hilarie had spent the happiest hours of her life. Friends, old and new, pressed around to wish them all happiness; and never, I think, was a more entirely beautiful wedding. It seemed a fitting prelude to the life they entered upon.

I was to shut up my rooms, and spend a fortnight with them at the *chalet*.

Seldom is a wedding party of four as united as were we. There was not one of us who did not genuinely love the other three.

We were fastening our wraps, — the double-seated, open carriage waiting at the door, — when Bertram said, —

“It is getting cold. I wish I had a warmer pair of driving-gloves.”

I turned, and opened my desk. But, remembering that the gloves had been worn by Harry, I hesitated, on Hilarie's account, to offer them to Bert. But, the moment she saw them, she caught them up.

“Here, dear,” she said, offering them to him: “these are just the thing.”

He slipped on one, and buttoned it. Then he thrust his remaining hand into the other.

“What is this?” he said, pulling it off again.

He drew out a slip of folded paper, and looked inquiringly.

A strange intuition flashed upon me. I felt myself grow pale. My breath shortened. I dared not speak, and feigned to be arranging little Hal's dress.

“Why, this is” —

Hilarie leaned over his shoulder; and together they read — her marriage certificate.

“Oh! I'm so glad! so glad!” she cried, bursting into tears, that quite astonished Bert.

“I am a rich woman now,” she cried, when we were in the carriage; and, with all her happiness, I had never seen her so overjoyed as at that moment. And, that it was a perfectly unselfish joy, I very well knew.

In brief time the fortune came to her, and all the world congratulated Bert that he had secured the heiress. He brushed such people aside as he would flick off buzzing insects; but life has many changes, and Miser Gray's money came, at length, to be of great benefit in my brother's family.

BRIDE'S PROMISE.

BY MISS JULIA A. KNIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

Sir Gerald Haughton of Haughton sat alone in the chill winter evening in the grand old dining-room, with the portraits of dead and gone Haughtons looking down at the solitary man as he lay back in his arm-chair, gazing musingly into the fire, the light shining on the costly silver and glass of the dessert on the table, and flashing on his grave, noble face, upon which Time's fingers had begun to lay a trace. Sir Gerald Haughton was long past forty and a bachelor yet, and people said that Haughton would never have a mistress, *although there were young ladies enough who would be only too proud to accept the hand of tall, stately-looking old Sir Gerald, whose dark locks were fast turning iron-gray.*

But Sir Gerald little cared what people said or thought,—it was nothing to him. He let them go their way, and fully determined to go his without question or reason to any one. On this night he sat looking very thoughtfully into the fire, resting his cheek on his hand, a half-wistful look in his kindly blue eyes. The rain was dashing and pattering on the window-panes, and the November wind howled mournfully enough around the great old house that had faced many and many a wild storm. Suddenly Sir Gerald raised his head, and listened; a ring at the hall door was pealing through the house, and in a few minutes the door was opened and a young lady was shown in. He started to his feet.

"Bride, my dear child, what has happened?"

He led her to the fire and took off her wet cloak, displaying a very fair pale face, *with fair hair and dark blue eyes. There were rain-drops on her hair and face, and, exhausted with buffeting with the rain and wind, or from some other cause, she was trembling all over.* Sir Gerald repeated his question, but received no answer. Evidently his strange visitor was too agitated to speak.

"What is it, dear?" he said, taking her

cold, trembling hands in his own warm, strong ones. "What has happened to make you come out on a night like this? Nothing wrong at home, I hope?"

Then she lifted her face and looked up at him with eyes full of trouble and lips that quivered and would not speak.

"Sir Gerald," she said at last, "I have been trying to come to you all day, I wanted to see you, and"—*She stopped, while crimson blushes dyed her cheeks.*

"Well?" he interrogated gently.

"It is about my brother Aleck," said Bride in a low tremulous voice.

"Well, Bride, and what about him?" He spoke very quietly and calmly, his kind eyes looking down at the girl's agitated face. "Is it any trouble, dear?" he said. "Do you want my help? You know, Bride, I would do anything for you."

Bride's eyes drooped.

"I want you to lend me one thousand pounds."

It was out at last, with a kind of gasp, and then her eyes flashed one frightened glance up at his face to see the effect of her words. But, if Sir Gerald felt any surprise at the strangeness of the request, he showed none, and only said,—

"Two thousand pounds, if you wish. Shall I write you a check now?"

Bride burst out crying, and hid her face in her hands.

"How I hate myself for having asked!" she sobbed. "Oh, what can you think of me for asking for what I may never, never be able to pay back again? But you were the only friend I had."

"Hush!" he said quietly. "Let there be no talk of paying back between you and me, Bride. I once said there is nothing I would not do for you,—and I mean it, and consider it a proof of your trust in my words, your coming to me in your trouble. Now tell me about Aleck."

He placed her in the velvet arm-chair, and stood looking down at her with a strange expression on his face, as she leaned forward, thanking him in a broken, shaky voice for what he had done.

"You have saved him," she said, "from ruin and disgrace. Poor Aleck! he dared not write to papa, and so he wrote to me, and said there was nothing to do but sell his commission,—he had debts on every side." She stopped, and then went on, while the color mounted to her face—"I showed no one the letter, and they do not know I came here tonight, and—and, if I send him the money, Aleck would guess where I got it—and"—

"I will manage it for you," said Sir Gerald. "Don't trouble yourself, child; I will arrange it all so that Aleck will never know. Will that do?"

"Oh, what can I do to thank you?" responded Bride gratefully, looking up into his face with eyes full of tears.

"You can do something," he said, suddenly coming forward and bending his eyes upon her. "Be my wife, Bride,—little Bride. I have loved you long. Do you think you could be happy with your old friend to love and take care of you always? Look up, child, and tell me. Will you be my wife?"

And with white lips Bride faltered "I will," though even as she did so another face rose up before her, and the hand Sir Gerald held turned cold as ice.

It was a strange wooing; but Sir Gerald Haughton little thought that he had bought his future wife for a thousand pounds; that Bride, her heart filled with gratitude to her friend, dared not answer "No," when he asked her to give herself to him. He had been planning it so long that he never knew it fell like a thunderbolt upon Bride, whose young face turned white to the lips as she lifted her eyes to his and realized how matters actually stood,—that she had promised to marry Sir Gerald Haughton, and that her promise must be kept.

"I must go," she said in a low, frightened voice. "They will miss me at home."

Sir Gerald laid his hand on the bell.

"It is raining; I will take you home in the carriage."

"Oh, no!" I can walk quite well."

"Nay," he said, smiling, "you are mine now; it is new to have some one to take care of."

Bride shuddered. She had sold herself indeed,—a sacrifice for her favorite brother,—and yet, as she heard Sir Gerald's kind voice, she thought she might have been happy as his wife if it had not

been— Oh, that time-worn refrain "what might have been!"

Sir Gerald took her face in his hands, pushing back the bright fair hair, and looking down at the deep blue eyes with their eyelashes still wet.

"You must not look so sad, little Bride," he said tenderly. "I will do my best to make you happy. You will be an old man's darling, Bride." And he never knew what it cost her to smile an answer up into his face.

Bride drove home very silently by Sir Gerald Haughton, letting her hand lie passive in his. He had known her since she was a tiny child in white frocks and blue shoes, with rings of silky gold hair round her baby face, and wondering child-like eyes; she had been very fond of him always, and now he was going to have her for his wife. But he never knew that the tears were running down her face like rain, nor that her heart beat hard and fast with a dull foreboding, as he talked of the future,—their future together!

Bride Levison remained pale and silent, with tightly compressed lips, while her sisters discussed and rediscussed her engagement with Sir Gerald Haughton, which was a matter of no small surprise to all of them.

"How grand you will be, Bride," said one, "with your own carriage and everything you could wish!"

"A carriage does n't constitute happiness," returned Bride, with a sigh.

"And it will be so nice living so near," said another.

"O Bride, fancy being Lady Haughton! How grand it sounds!"

And so the girls rattled on, never noticing how utterly miserable Bride looked as they chatted away about the wedding, until suddenly one of them, glancing out of the window, exclaimed,—

"Here comes Jack Beresford! How surprised he will be to hear the news! What a nice face he has! Bride, I wonder at your choosing Sir Gerald when you might have had Captain Beresford."

Bride stood up, the color rushing hotly over her face, her breath coming quickly.

"I have a headache," she said hurriedly. "I think I will go up-stairs and lie down;" and Bride went away and shut her door, and the family saw her no more that day.

Jack Beresford did not, however, come up

to Dr. Levison's doorstep, but passed on his way down the street, raising his hat with a nod and a smile up toward the window, where the girls were sitting with their work; and Bride, as she caught the glance from his brown eyes, and saw the face and figure she knew so well, pressed her hands tightly together and wished that she was dead. Jack Beresford, the gay, handsome Dragoon, sauntered on, humming a lively air, and dreaming of a bright and not far-distant future, with Bride's blue eyes to smile on him always. Down the street he went, intent on his own pleasant thoughts, glancing over the house-tops at the bare trees and tall chimneys of Haughton, little thinking that the owner of that old and many-gabled house had already dashed his castle in the air to the ground, or that Bride Levison was at that moment weeping passionately in her own room,—weeping for him and for herself.

Poor Jack! He was disenchanted soon enough. Ill news flies apace. He came suddenly upon two of his brother-officers standing upon the bridge and gazing down at the river, and presently one of them, looking him full in the face, said,—

"I say, Beresford, have you heard the news? Miss Levison is going to marry Haughton."

Jack's heart gave a great thump, and the color mounted to his forehead; but he said quietly,—so quietly that the others never knew how much hung upon the answer,—

"There are four Miss Levisons,—which of them do you mean?"

"The beauty, of course,—Bride. I suppose she is marrying him for his money, as Dr. Levison is poor. I'm awfully sorry for you, Jack."

Jack set his teeth under his mustache, and a sudden light came into his brown eyes; but he was man enough to conquer the indignant words that rose to his lips. As he went away, however, he no longer planned a bright future or hummed snatches of songs. His two friends stood and looked after him.

"You should have broken it to him gently, Stuart. Poor fellow, he is awfully hard hit in that quarter."

"He'll get over it," was Major Stuart's easy reply. "I've done so lots of times myself."

Get over it! Jack Beresford did not think so, when he met Bride alone for the

first time, and saw how she turned away and dared not meet his eyes.

"It is not, it cannot be true!" And then Bride looked him in the face, and answered slowly,—

"It is true,—I have promised to marry Sir Gerald Haughton."

That was a very painful interview for both. Jack pleaded, and pleaded well and eloquently, for he had a great deal at stake; and he little knew how nearly he had won his cause, or how much it cost his pale, agitated listener to keep to her resolution. How hard it was to close her trembling lips with the same unshaken decision,—to answer "No" when her heart said "Yes!" Love and duty fought hard as Jack forced the confession from the unwilling lips that she did care for him and him only; and, when she entreated him to go, fearful of wavering, even for a moment, in her resolution, Jack caught her hand.

"Bride, look at me. Why do you marry Sir Gerald Haughton when you say yourself you care only for me? Answer,—I will have the truth!"

His eyes were very stern. Bride met them for one brief second; her courage was almost gone. She had very nearly given in, when the recollection of the debt she owed Sir Gerald flashed upon her, and when she spoke Jack knew his cause was lost.

"You have no right to ask that question," she said almost proudly, "nor I to answer it. Jack, if you were to speak for ever, I could give you no other answer. Let it be good-by between us now."

He threw her hands from him with a passionate exclamation, and an angry flush rose to his face.

"Lady Haughton! I see. I might have known any woman would sell herself for a title. I was a fool to imagine you would marry a simple captain in a Cavalry regiment."

Bride did not answer,—she only lowered her white face; and Jack, feeling hurt, grieved, and indignant, stood for a moment regarding her in silence.

The door opened,—"*Sir Gerald Haughton.*"

Bride turned, and her dark sad eyes met those of Jack. He snatched up his hat and dashed from the house as Sir Gerald, his face lighting up with pleasure, came forward and took Bride's hand in his.

"I have heard from Aleck," she said,

looking up into his face with a little smile as they sat talking together. "Here is his letter. He fills three whole sheets with expressions of surprise and delight, showering blessings on his unknown benefactor. I can never, never thank you enough."

Sir Gerald laughed.

"Never mind the letter, child. Your face, when you talk of Aleck, more than repays me for the trifling service I was able to do him. And now I want to have a talk. When will you come to Haughton? I am very lonely, Bride."

A frightened look came over her face, her heart beat fast. To Haughton! Sir Gerald spoke as if she belonged to him already. His kind blue eyes were watching her a little anxiously.

"Do you regret your promise, Bride?"

There was a moment's struggle with herself. Should she tell him the truth and let him decide? While she argued the question in her mind, Sir Gerald laid his hand upon hers.

"Are you sorry for what you said, Bride? Do you not care enough for your old friend to be his wife? He spoke very gently, but there was anxiety in the quiet tones as he added, 'Will you not try to love me a little, Bride? I will do my very best to make you happy, for indeed you are most dear to me.'"

And Bride sealed her fate with her own lips and then burst into bitter weeping.

"I am not good enough to be your wife," she sobbed; and he took her in his arms, kissing her gravely and tenderly as he said fondly, —

"I am the best judge of that, I think. And now when will you come to Haughton?"

"When you wish," was the low whispered reply; and Bride knew there was no drawing back now. And so the day was fixed for the wedding.

Sir Gerald Haughton loaded his future wife with presents, and she smiled and thanked him for each proof of his love, and he looked into the blue unclouded eyes that smiled up into his, and never guessed of the sad bitter tears that dimmed those eyes in secret when, in the stillness of the night, her face hidden in the pillow, Bride fought with herself, trying hard to banish Jack's face from her heart and memory, while the scalding tears ran down her cheeks as she pictured her life — the life of duty she had

chosen and mapped out for herself — and the thought was ever present that Jack must never know the truth. He must always think hardly of her; and many and many a time Bride had opened her lips to tell all to Sir Gerald Haughton, and then, as she lifted her eyes and looked up into his face, the unspoken words died away upon her lips, and the opportunity was lost.

CHAPTER II.

The officers of the —th Dragoons gave a grand farewell ball to the people of the county, for their regiment was going to be replaced by another, and there were many sad hearts at the thought of parting from friends, or perhaps a little more than friends. But none carried so heavy a heart as Jack Beresford, who stood alone, on the night of the ball, with a gloomy face, which changed suddenly as his eyes rested on Bride coming into the room, the fairest of a bevy of fair sisters.

She was dressed in white, and carried a large and beautiful bouquet, the gift of Sir Gerald, who walked beside her, looking proud and conscious as he bent low to talk to the fair girl at his side. Bride was very pale, with downcast eyes, and poor Jack, feeling his disappointment more keenly than ever in the presence of what he had lost, watched her as she went through a quadrille with Sir Gerald, and resolved, come what might, that he would see her once more that night, even were it for the last time.

"Now, Bride," said Sir Gerald, looking very tall and stately in his evening dress, with his gray hair and mustache making him look older than he really was, "dance away all night if you like, child, but don't ask me to do any round dances. I am a little too old for that sort of thing, you know."

"Miss Levison, may I have the pleasure of this waltz?"

At the sound of the speaker's voice the crimson blood rushed over Bride's pale face. Jack stood looking at her, at the downcast face and at the eyes that would not meet his after the first frightened glance, as she laid both hands on Sir Gerald's arm to steady herself while she struggled for a moment to conquer her agitation.

"I do not care to waltz," she faltered at last.

"Yes, do," Sir Gerald interposed; and

then Bride laid her hand upon Jack's arm, and, glancing for a second up into his face, wished she had not left Sir Gerald Haughton. They danced together, and neither spoke till the waltz was over; and then Jack, very pale and stern, looked down at Bride and said, —

"I have waited long for this opportunity. It has come at last. You shall now give me the answer you would not give me before."

He was in earnest, and Bride trembled from head to foot as he led her unresistingly away, and then stood before her waiting in silence for the answer to his question. He was in uniform, and it became him well. A fine handsome young fellow he looked as he stood erect, determined, one hand resting upon his hip; and, as Bride glanced at his face and at the dark earnest eyes that demanded the truth, and listened to the voice that found an echo in her own heart, the tears crowded to her eyes, and her face was as hopelessly sad as his own.

"What is your reason?" he urged. "Are you marrying him for his money?"

"No," answered Bride, with crimson cheeks.

"His title then?"

"No," she replied again very sorrowfully, with tears trembling on her eyelashes.

"Then in Heaven's name what do you mean?" he burst out passionately. "If you care neither for him, nor his money, nor his title, why do you make us both miserable for life? You must, you shall tell me!"

"I cannot, I cannot!"

Her voice was choked with weeping. Poor Jack felt that he could cry too; he took a couple of hasty turns up and down, and then, sitting down, possessed himself of her hand.

"You have treated me very unkindly," he said sadly. "You knew I loved you, and, Bride, I must have been blind had I not seen you did care for me. — and yet you throw me over without any reason, any explanation. O my darling! life is not worth having without you! It is not too late yet. Why make us both unhappy? Sir Gerald is an old man. He cannot love you as I do."

Bride listened in silence, and then lifted her pale face sadly to him.

"I have no right to listen to you, Jack; in three weeks I shall be Sir Gerald Haugh-

ton's wife, — please say no more. I must not, I cannot give you any other answer."

"Have you no heart?" he said bitterly.

"I wish I had not," was the low, heart-broken response. "O Jack, please say no more! I cannot bear it."

"Then I am to understand that this is final?" he said, rising to his feet and looking down at her agitated face, the sweetest and most beautiful face on earth for him.

"Yes, it must be all over between us, Jack; how I wish for your sake that we had never met!"

"Bride," he said impetuously, "I won't give you up till you say you wish it with your own lips."

"I do wish it." The words were spoken very slowly, very distinctly.

Jack turned away.

"Then thank Heaven we leave this next week, and" — turning suddenly, with passion in his eyes and voice — "may I never look upon your face again!"

In sad silence, her lips closed tightly, Bride listened to his angry words and to the bitter reproaches that followed.

"I don't care what becomes of me," he said, — "and I don't suppose you do either; but, when you hear that Jack Beresford has gone to the dogs, you will have the consolation of knowing that it was all your doing. Do you wish to return to Sir Gerald Haughton now? He will be wondering at your long absence."

Bride stood up and laid her hand upon his arm; her voice was trembling.

"Jack, we cannot part like this. I deserve your reproaches; but, oh, won't you forgive me before you go, and then try to forget that there was ever such a person as Bride Levison?"

He looked down into her uplifted sorrowful eyes, his face softening in spite of himself.

"I never can forget you, and to say I forgive you now would not be true; perhaps I may do so later on. Bride, give me one little flower to keep."

She was taking one out of her bouquet when he stopped her.

"No, those were his flowers. Give me something he has never had anything to do with."

Bride smiled a sad, weary smile.

"What can I give you?" Then, drawing a little pearl ring from off her finger, she handed it to him. "Keep it, Jack, till you

have forgiven me. Send it back when you can look life in the face, and say I am forgotten. Promise to do so."

"I promise; but that time will never come. I shall keep this till I die."

He kissed the hand that gave him the ring, and, with a wistful look at the sweet face, with its golden hair, and dark-fringed eyes, — the face he could never forget, — he whispered, —

"One more dance."

And none knew, as those two kept time to the merry music, that they were both bidding good-by to the love-story of their youth; and Sir Gerald, as he watched Bride's light figure gliding by, wondered why the blue eyes that met his for a moment were so heavy and sad.

The winter sun shone down brightly and cheerily upon a gay, busy scene. The —th Dragoons were falling in. Horses were prancing, officers shouting orders, the trumpet was sounding; and then the regiment formed into column. The band struck up "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and the dragoons rode slowly up the street, looking up at the many faces smiling a farewell at the windows.

Just before Jack Beresford mounted his horse a little note was put into his hand; only three lines, blurred and blotted, — yet his heart beat, and, as he turned away his head under pretext of tightening his horse's girths, he kissed the little bit of paper, and his eyes were full of tears.

It was a last message from Bride.

"Live out your life bravely and well. Forget and forgive me, and Heaven bless you forever, Jack. Good-by! BRIDE."

And then the trumpet sounded through the clear air: the regiment was getting into motion. Jack dashed his hand across his eyes, and, springing on his horse, joined his troop, riding slowly beside his men, his young face very grave and sad as he looked up at Dr. Levison's house for a last glimpse of the face he loved so well.

And Bride, her face pale as death, her blue eyes dim with weeping, gazed down at the regiment so gayly marching away, with colors flying, and band playing, the sun glancing down on the shining helmets and waving plumes, on the mass of scarlet coats, — the gay uniform of England's heroes, —

on the steel trappings of the horses, all glinting and gleaming in the sunshine. Bride saw it all through a mist of bitter tears. Her sisters were waving farewells from the drawing-room windows below; but alone in her own room Bride stood at the open window, behind the lace curtains, watching the gay column filing slowly past.

And then Jack drew rein for one brief second, and looked up into her face yearningly, longingly, — a last lingering farewell. And when he rode away, turning often for a last look at what he had loved and lost, Bride felt as if all that was dearest and sweetest in life was passing away.

And so they parted; and Bride's soldier-lover, Jack Beresford, looking so brave and handsome, was quickly lost to sight over the summit of the hill.

CHAPTER III.

It was winter again, and the giant trees of Haughton were once more naked and bare, rearing their black branches against the wintry sky, while underneath their withered leaves lay crisp and brown, blown hither and thither by the wild winds.

Bride had been Lady Haughton for nearly a year; and Sir Gerald was as proud and fond of his beautiful young wife as ever. She was indeed, as he had said, an old man's darling, ever first and foremost in his thoughts, and Bride buried the dead past in her heart, and turned a fair, smiling face to the world. So none guessed that the beautiful Lady Haughton, so sought after and admired by all, carried a sad and heavy heart, and that all the joy had gone out of her life forever when she laid her hand in Sir Gerald's, and promised to be his wife; and her husband never knew that she had given herself to him in payment of the debt that had saved her brother from ruin and disgrace, for Bride tried hard to make him a good wife, and to return a little of the love that he showed for her in every word and action. Nevertheless, Sir Gerald wondered a little sometimes when his wife, sitting on a low stool at his feet, rested her fair head against his knee, and pressed her lips to his hand, while tears filled her eyes.

"Why are you unhappy, Bride?" he would say, in a tone of loving concern. "Is there anything you wish for, little wife? Is Haughton dull? You know I live only

for your happiness. Tell me, darling, do you wish for anything?"

And then the pale, sweet face, and sad, serious eyes, would be lifted to him.

"No, Gerald: I want nothing."

"Then why those tears?"

"It is because you love me so much. Gerald, you have given me everything, and I can do so little for you in return."

"Hush, child!" he would say, laying his hand gently on her head. "You gave me all I wanted, all I asked for,—your own self. You have made old Haughton a very paradise for me, Bride."

It was a cold, bleak, winter evening, dark and gloomy, and Bride shuddered as she drew aside the heavy curtains, and looked out into the darkness, listening for the tramp of horses' hoofs that would announce Sir Gerald's return. He had gone off early that morning to a "meet," and had not yet returned. Sir Gerald was a keen sportsman, and often put many a younger man to shame in the hunting-field; but there were some who shook their heads, and prophesied that Sir Gerald Haughton's reckless courage would some day bring him to grief.

Bride listened for a time, and then went back to the fire, looking thoughtfully down at it, and wondering that her husband did not come home. It was past the dinner-hour, and he was later than usual. She was dressed for the evening, well and richly, as Sir Gerald always liked to see his wife, and wore a long dress of purple velvet, open at the neck, and trimmed round the throat and sleeves with swan's-down. Rich jeweled bracelets gleamed upon her bare arms, and her fair hair was caught up and fastened by a diamond buckle.

"Look your best, darling," Sir Gerald had said as he rode off that morning: "I may bring a friend or two home to dinner."

Bride had everything a fond, indulgent husband could give: her slightest wish was gratified. Surrounded by all that wealth could procure or luxury dictate, her lot was one to be envied. Young, rich, loved and idolized, and the most beautiful woman in the county,—what more could human heart desire? And yet the eyes now looking from under their dark lashes were very sad; for money cannot give some things, and happiness is not to be purchased.

Suddenly there was the sound of a horse galloping furiously up the avenue, and a

minute afterward a gentleman, splashed with mud, and pale and breathless from hard and fast riding, came into the room. Bride started, and turned very pale.

"My husband," she faltered,—"has anything happened to him?"

"He is hurt, Lady Haughton,—they are bringing him home. Your father is with him."

Bringing him home! How much those words conveyed! With white lips and great terrified eyes, Bride listened as the gentleman, almost as much agitated as she was, tried to break it to her gently, and told how Sir Gerald's horse had refused a high wall; how his master had urged him to it with whip and spur, till the infuriated animal took one bound, missed the wall, and then fell heavily back upon its rider, breaking its own neck as it did so.

Looking at the speechless agony on Bride's face as he told his story, he kept back the truth, and forbore to tell the wife that her husband's hours were numbered. His back was broken, and Sir Gerald Haughton was being brought home to die.

Half an hour later there was the tramp of many feet, and the master of Haughton was carried in. There was a crowd of sad, frightened faces around, and a sound of bitter weeping, as the old man-servant who had known Sir Gerald since he was a child burst into tears on perceiving his master. But they all fell back as Bride came forward, and shrieked while she looked upon the sight of her husband lying pale and speechless, with the look of death upon his face. There was blood upon his gray hair, and upon his red hunting-coat. He seemed a sad, almost lifeless burden carried home to die.

He opened his eyes as Bride's wild cry rang through the hall; and, holding out his hand, smiled up into his wife's agonized face, and fainted.

"Go away, Bride," said Dr. Levison gravely. "My poor child, this is no sight for you. Go to the drawing-room,—I will come to you presently."

And in less than an hour they came and told her that Sir Gerald was dying,—that he had not many hours to live. With a white, despairing face, Bride looked up into her father's pitying eyes.

"O papa! save him! Get more advice, and save him. He must not die! He loves me so; and I have been unworthy of him."

"Hush, Bride! My darling, be brave. Go to Gerald: you will not have him long with you now."

But, with wild entreaties to do something to save the life that was ebbing so fast away, she clung to her father's hand, and then after a while went up-stairs to see her husband for the last time,—still hoping against hope. But no human power could save him. Sir Gerald could not live, and he knew it. When the horse fell upon him, and they came and drew him from under its dead body, he had looked up in their faces, and said quietly,—

"I shall never leap ditch or gate again: carry me home to die."

All night Bride sat beside him, holding his hand in hers, weeping bitterly as she thought of his love and kindness, watching his white, unconscious face drawn and compressed with pain. Then, as the gray dawn lit up the far east, he spoke.

"Bride, are you there? Poor little wife! Death is about to separate us."

She laid her cold, pale cheek on his hand, and hushed her choking sobs to listen to his last words; and they talked together in sad, solemn tones, as only those who are about to be parted for ever can talk,—sadly and sorrowfully of the past, the present, and the future.

"Bride," said Sir Gerald, lifting his hand and laying it on her head, "after all, dear, why be so sad? We are going to be parted only for a little while. It may be a strange fancy, but I want to die holding the belief that you will remain mine always. Bride, promise me now, as I lie upon my death-bed, that you will never marry again. It is my last, my dying wish. Will you swear now, before Heaven, to be mine always, and only mine?"

He looked steadily into the eyes that were lifted imploringly to his.

"Speak, Bride,—I am going. Promise, before I die."

"I promise."

His head fell back upon the pillows.

"Kiss me, my darling. Good-by!"

Bride bent forward, but the lips she pressed to her dying husband's brow were cold as ice.

Those were his last words. When the chill morning light came into the room it shone on the cold, calm face of the dead; for Sir Gerald had gone to his long home, and Bride was a widow,—a widow at twen-

ty-one,—bound by a strange promise to remain so as long as her life might last.

CHAPTER IV.

It was early spring: the snows and frosts were giving place to genial sunshine, and in sheltered nooks the purple violets were peeping out from the hedge-banks, while the birds sang joyously, rejoicing that winter had gone, and spring, soft, gentle spring, had come at last.

Sir Gerald, the last of the Haughtons, had been dead for more than a year, and Bride still lived in the deepest seclusion at Haughton,—pale, sad, and sorrowful, rarely going beyond her own gates except on Sunday, when many eyes rested on the fair young widow,—looking all the fairer and paler for her black dress,—as she went up to the Haughton pew, lonely and sad, the shadow of a sorrow deeper than widowhood resting in her grave, earnest eyes that so seldom smiled,—for night and day the one thought was ever present that some day Jack would come again; and how was she to meet him?

Meantime, Jack Beresford had seen the announcement of Sir Gerald's death. His first sensation was one of joy,—for Bride, his first and last love, was free again; and a strange thrill of hope shot through his heart as he looked down at the little pearl ring that she had given him, which was hanging at his watch-chain. Recalling the events of the night of the ball, he smiled softly to himself.

"She shall be mine," he said. "I will win her yet."

Poor Jack! He little knew that he was separated from Bride forever by a vow that was strong and impassable as death itself.

Alone, and weeping as if her heart would break, Bride read, and blistered with bitter tears, a letter from Jack. He was coming,—was on his way already,—unchanged, loving her as fondly as ever,—coming after waiting for more than a year,—coming in faith and hope to claim her as his own. There was no struggle as to what she ought to do: her path was as clear as the day, and that path must be followed. But, dreading lest she should be made to yield in spite of herself, and not daring to trust her own heart when she should stand face to face with Jack, Bride knelt down, bowed her tear-stained face on her hands, and prayed

for help to enable her to do right; and then, struggling to be calm,—an outward calmness, that broke down when most it was needed,—she went slowly down-stairs to meet him, her head bent, her eyes cast down.

After a moment's pause at the drawing-room door, she went in, and, looking up, saw Jack coming hastily forward, hope and joy in his eyes.

"At last!" he said, his whole face lighting up with happiness as he caught both her hands in his.

"O Jack! why have you come?"

At her tone and look of such hopeless anguish and misery, he paused a moment, and then, looking down on her, said reproachfully,—

"Does not your own heart answer that question? Bride, I have waited long; and I have come for my reward at last."

"Stop!" she cried imploringly. "O Jack! if you knew how I have prayed Heaven night and day that you might have forgotten me."

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed, a suspicion of the truth sending all the light and joy out of his eyes.

Bride turned away her face, and spoke in a low, pained voice,—

"What am I to say? How can I tell you?"

"That you no longer care for me?" he interrupted.

"No, oh, no!" she said earnestly. "But, Jack, oh, bear with me, and hear me patiently!"

"What is all this?" demanded Jack, speaking in a strange, hard voice. "Bride, what can come between us now?"

With a despairing gesture she clasped her hands tightly together, and Jack bent his head to catch her low, tremulous words.

"I will tell you," she said. "We can never, never be anything to each other again! I have to send you away, Jack,—though I think it will break my heart!"

She was almost speechless with emotion. He laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Bride, what can separate us now?" he asked.

The moment had come,—she must tell him now,—and, with a gasping sob, the truth was spoken at last.

"He was dying, and he made me promise never to marry again. It was his last wish. Oh, why don't you speak? Say you don't

care much, Jack. He was dying, and he had loved me so."

Her last words loosed Jack's tongue.

"Loved you!" he exclaimed, "and made you promise that?"

"He was dying," she repeated. "It was his last wish."

"And you?" gasped poor Jack.

"I promised."

"Bride, are you mad?" he said passionately. "Such a promise cannot be binding. Speak! Why do you turn away your face? Surely, you cannot mean to keep such a promise as that?"

"I must."

It was such a sad, hopeless voice.

Jack spoke again.

"If he had loved you truly, he would have cared only for your happiness. It was shameful, cruel, to ask such a thing from you!"

"Hush, Jack! He is dead."

Bride's tears were falling fast; her voice was almost heart-broken in its sorrow. Yearning for love and sympathy, it was hard to send away both forever.

Jack walked up and down the room. There were tears in his eyes; but he dashed them away passionately, scorning to show an emotion he deemed discreditable to his manhood.

"And you are determined," he said, at last, "to gratify the selfish wishes of a dying man, who I dare say at the time scarcely knew what he was saying? Bride, if you cared for me, you would never let such a thing stand in the way."

"I do care for you, Jack; but I cannot break a promise to the dead."

"The living are more to be considered than the dead. He is gone. Are we, who are so much to each other, to be separated by such an unreasonable promise? Bride, darling, let your own heart decide."

"Jack, if you love me, say no more," wailed Bride, her eyes full of unspeakable grief.

Jack, however, perhaps selfish in his own misery, used every argument he could think of to induce her to break the almost sacred promise made to the dying man; but all his entreaties were unavailing. Bride was firm, and at last he began to see that his hope was vain.

"Tell me, at least," he said, "why you married Sir Gerald Haughton."

Her pale face slowly crimsoned beneath

his gaze. There could be no harm in his knowing the truth now; and, in a low, trembling voice, she told him all, just as it had happened.

Jack drew a long, regretful sigh.

"Why did you not come to me?" he said reproachfully. "It would all have ended differently then. Bride, had you known what he would have asked as the price of his help, would you have gone to Sir Gerald Haughton?"

"I don't know: I thought only of Aleck. It was for his sake. Tell me: do you think I did right?"

"Yes, and no," said Jack, sorrowfully regarding her. "Yes, when you look at the matter from your side; no, when you knew that your marriage would wreck both our lives. It was noble of you to sacrifice your life's happiness for your brother, but I don't think you considered me, Bride."

"I thought you would forget me," were the low-whispered words.

"Forget you!" he echoed. "Do people forget so easily? or did you measure my feelings by your own? Nay," he added gently, seeing the reproach in her eyes, "I did not mean it. My disappointment makes me say bitter things; and, when I think of what is parting us forever, it almost drives me mad."

"I wish I could bear this trouble for you, Jack," and Bride raised her tearful eyes sadly to him. "But you must not think of me," she continued, "or let this disappointment spoil your life. You are a man, and the world is all before you yet. We must never see each other; but, Jack, I shall hear of you, and some day be proud of my soldier-hero. It has all been a mistake; we must, however, make the best of it now."

Bride tried to smile, but failed. Jack's face never changed from its expression of gloomy sorrow. At last he rose to go.

"Bride, tell me with your own lips that you love me."

"You know I do, Jack," was all she said, very sadly and earnestly.

He stooped and pressed his first and last kiss on the pale, sweet face that he was never to see again, held her close to his heart for a moment, and then was gone, driving down the avenue, out at the great gates of Haughton, and away; while Bride, with a sorrow beyond tears, sat mute and motionless, her face hidden in her hands,

wishing—as those in the first moments of a great trouble are wont to wish—that she might die; for, oh, life was very long, and he was gone forever!

CHAPTER V.

The —th Dragoons were despatched to India, and Jack Beresford sailed with his regiment, little caring what became of him, longing only for change. He had excitement enough soon.

Long before the news of the Indian Mutiny and all its horrors had reached home, Jack was commencing in earnest his career as a soldier, being ever first and foremost, with a wild, daring courage that amounted to recklessness, almost wishing to lose his life that Bride might hear how he had died. That thought was always in his heart, her name ever on his lips, when he dashed to the front, sabre uplifted, cutting down all before him, his brave dark eyes flashing with excitement, reckless, heedless of life, thinking only of the fair face he loved, but could never win for his own.

And, watching at home, pale and haggard with anxiety, Bride read eagerly all the news of that terrible time in India, her heart full of the one dread, the one fear that would not go away, the strange presentiment that came back day by day, till doubt turned to reality, and fear seemed truth.

It came at last. The paper dropped from Bride's hand: Jack Beresford was among the dead, his name in the long list of slain.

She uttered a low, heart-broken cry of anguish, and her white, grief-stricken face dropped upon her hands. He was dead: brave, handsome Jack Beresford, who had loved her so truly and so well, — Jack was dead. There would be no further struggle now between heart and conscience to keep her husband's dying wish. It was all over. In a foreign land Jack had died a soldier's death, and lay far away in a lonely grave; and Bride wept sad and bitter tears: she would never know if he had thought of her when dying.

"O Jack!" she sobbed, "did you forgive me, darling, before you died?"

Bride's wish, her almost prayer, was granted: she learned how Jack had died.

When the Indian Mutiny was some time an event of the past, one day there came a

visitor to Haughton,—the colonel of poor Jack's regiment, home on sick-leave, with an empty sleeve pinned across his breast,—a gray-haired veteran, with a grim, stern face that softened as he looked down at Bride, pale and sad, standing before him.

"Lady Haughton," he said abruptly, "I have brought you a message from the dead."

Bride's lip quivered as she asked, —

"From Captain Beresford?"

The colonel took two or three hasty turns up and down the room, unable to meet the wistful, questioning eyes; then he wheeled round, saying, —

"Mac'am, when he fell, we lost one of the finest fellows in the service. I was as sorry for him as I would have been for my own boy."

"How did he die?" faltered Bride, turning a shade paler, and pressing her hands tightly together, as she lifted her sad eyes to the colonel's face.

"As a soldier should," replied the old man proudly, his face glowing with pride. "He was as brave as a lion, and feared nothing. He died a hero's death, at the head of his men, cheering them on to victory. Ay! and they were proud to follow him. I think I see him now,—that brave, handsome boy,—as he charged, cheering, and waving his sabre. Suddenly he reeled in his saddle, and fell. Never can I forget what I felt when I saw his head go down. Poor Jack! They carried him to the rear, and he smiled at me as they were bearing him past. He died that evening, and was buried at sundown."

Bride's head drooped lower and lower as he went on.

"I was sent for, and he died in my arms,—at peace, happy. There was a smile on his lips when his eyes closed forever. It was not like death,—he seemed just to fall asleep; and before he died he bade me hand you this little pearl ring: he said you gave it to him. I think—ah! I know he loved you in the old days when you were Bride Levison. Poor fellow! he never got over that."

"Did he say anything?" asked Bride, her

eyes overflowing with tears. "Did he send any message?"

"Yes: he spoke much of you, and his last words were, —

"Tell her that all is forgiven, and that I loved her to the end."

"Lady Haughton, he died with your name on his lips. There,—do not weep so: he is at rest, and happy."

There were tears in the old colonel's eyes as he finished. Jack had told him his story when he was dying, and given him his last message for Bride, with the little pearl ring, and a lock of his hair.

"Thank Heaven," wept Bride, "he forgave me before he died!"

Bride Haughton lives. She has learned, through much suffering, that our lives are not our own to make or mar as we please,—that we may not say that our lot is too hard, our cross too heavy, and that we cannot live because happiness is denied us.

After the first struggle was over, she bowed her fair head in meek submission, and was taught that life is not all ended when those we have loved are gone. There was work for her to do; and meekly and humbly she took for her own the motto she had given Jack on the day his regiment marched away: "Live out your life bravely and well."

There were many sick and suffering and poor, many weary and heart-broken ones, sorely needing the love and kindness that so seldom come to such. To these, Bride stretched out her right hand in help, and the rentals of Haughton went to succor the sad and sorrowful, and to gladden many a sunless home.

Humbly, lovingly, she worked and works, never forgetting the past. The look of suffering never leaves the beautiful, sorrowful face, and there is ever a shadow of sadness resting in the deep-blue eyes; and the poor and the weary love the sweet voice when Bride sits beside the sick and dying reading the Word of Life. Surely, if she has brought peace and comfort even to one heart, her life will not have been spent in vain.

CAUGHT IN THE REBOUND.

BY ADA STRICKLAND.

"Bessie! Bessie!" called Grandma Ross from the pantry, "them pies is burnin', I 'm sure. Look in the oven quick, child."

But there was no quick "tap, tap," of Bessie's high-heeled shoes across the floor, in answer; and grandma herself was fain to hurry across the great kitchen, and fling wide open the oven-door.

Alas for the Western housewife's pride and glory! The pumpkin-pies, so well-shaped and golden when placed in the oven, were now only a heap of blackened, smoking ruins.

"Dear! dear!" said grandma disconsolately. "And here it is almost meeting-time, and no time to make any more. Where can Bessie be? I never knew the child do such a careless thing before."

"What are you scolding about, grandma?" said the sweet young voice grandma loved best to hear. "I heard you clear upstairs."

"And what on airtly was you doin' upstairs, Bessie Ross, I'd like to know? — and these 'ere pies all burnt to a crisp! Deary me!"

"Oh, I 'm so sorry, grandma. I'll make some more, though. Don't scold."

The bright, pretty face lifted to the old lady's just then was enough to disarm the ancient Xantippe if she had been there in person, and Grandma Ross could n't hold a candle to her for scolding.

"But you can't make any more," she said. "Them black ponies 'll be up here in a jiffy, now, to take you to meeting. Was

n't you up-stairs looking at that new dress just now?"

"Never mind," laughed Bessie; though a tell-tale blush stained her cheek as she rolled the sleeves down over her round, white arms, and hung her big kitchen apron on its nail behind the door. "I'll be all ready long before the ponies comë. Don't you worry."

"Listen," said grandma: "I hear buggy-wheels now."

Both went to the door, light-hearted; Bessie little suspecting that what she should see would spoil her happiness, not only for that day, but for many days thereafter. The black ponies were truly dashing through the lane; the glittering wheels of George Howard's new buggy springing merrily round in a cloud of dust, and George himself on the seat, his firm hand on the reins. But he did not pause for Bessie's little brother to open the great barn-yard gate, and then whirl lightly in, as he had done every meeting-day before for two years. No: there was another figure on the seat beside him, — a slender, stylish figure, in a robe of shimmering gray silk, and a hat of white lace and flowers, — a bridal-hat, plainly to be seen. Neither head was turned toward the old farmhouse; but who shall say that deep down in George Howard's heart there was not a shivering of remorse and shame? for he knew, as well as if he had been looking, how Bessie stood at the door, looking for him, shading her eyes with the little hand upon which gleamed the ring he had given her for a birthday gift; a betrothal gift also he knew she thought it was. And he had intended she should think so, though all the while upon the hand that now clasped his arm there had shone another and a costlier ring that truly meant betrothal. It was a shameful betrayal of trust, a shameless flirtation, on his part, he knew; but he meant to carry it off bravely today, with his haughty bride by his side.

"There, now," said Grandma Ross, "I should n't a mite wonder if Gorge Howard had married that stuck-up Alice Dorsey, after all. I heard some say, last meeting, that he went to see her pretty steady. Did n't he say nothin' to you about it, Bessie, child?"

The keen blue eyes turned suddenly to the spot where the girl had stood. But Bessie was gone. Out of the back door into

the orchard she ran like a wounded deer, until she fell prostrate on the velvety grass beneath the old apple-tree that rained its white blooms down upon her.

The blow was cruel in its suddenness. If she could only have seen him growing colder, drifting away from her, she could have borne it better; but only last sabbath night, as he kissed her lips, he had called her his "little wife," — words that always brought the bright blood to cheek and brow. And now! No wonder that she cowered in the grass, and hot tears of agony and shame streamed from the dark eyes. She never doubted that he was married. Some way it had never entered her mind that it might be a mistake; for, almost unknown to herself, there had always been mingled with her love for George Howard an element of distrust. Her own soul was too spotlessly pure not to recognize the falseness of his. And now how she thanked God that she had always been so chary of caresses and endearments that he had called her his "little prude"! That one kiss last sabbath night was all he would have to remember and boast of to his proud wife; all that she would have to remember in a shame that made her loathe the lips she had touched. It was a hard blow, Bessie Ross. But, dear child, you still have much to thank God for. Oh! if there is one punishment greater than another, when our God shall judge his creatures, will it not be given to such men as this George Howard, who only lacked the opportunity to become more than a murderer?

"Bessie! Bessie Ross!" called grandma from the porch. "Come, child, and get ready for meeting."

She was not blind, the dear old lady; but, judging from her own remembered girlhood, she knew Bessie was best left alone for a while. She knew, too, that, with all her gentleness, Bessie was proud, and would not ask sympathy, or wish to receive it.

Her pride came to her rescue now.

"I will go," she thought. "His triumph would be too great if I should stay away."

And she hastened to the house.

"Say, Bessie," said Willie, meeting her at the door, "did you see your feller goin' by with that other girl? Did n't?" —

But here he was caught by the shoulders, and whirled round so fast that his speech was utterly demoralized; and, when he stopped, he looked up in such a bewildered

way, that involuntarily a laugh rang from Bessie's lips.

"I am glad you can laugh, Miss Bessie," said Willie's tormentor, looking in mock gravity at the girl; "for verily I thought it was a ghost slipping out of the orchard, and thought I would stop Willie before he offended you."

"Need n't whirl a feller's brains out," grumbled the boy, retreating into the kitchen, leaving Bessie and her "big cousin," as she always called Harvey Lane, alone on the porch.

"Hurry, Bessie," was all he said. "I'm going to saddle 'Black Queen' for you. Don't you think you would like that better than to go in the 'express' with the old folks?"

"Of course I would," she said gratefully, looking into the honest blue eyes above her; "but they never will let me ride her alone, and I never thought of your going to Saturday meeting. I'll be ready in five minutes."

"It was no use telling her," thought Harvey, looking after the little figure with a tender light in his eyes, "that the only reason I am going to Saturday meeting now is because she has no one else to go with her."

But Bessie knew; and mingled with the love she had borne for Harvey Lane as her true friend from childhood was a new feeling of gratitude and appreciation.

They were orphans, these two,—one, the child of the only son of these old people, who met his fate at Gettysburg, leaving his child to his mother's tender care; the other, only an orphaned nephew, whose home had been on the farm since his earliest recollection, and who, since the death of their son, had become the mainstay and pride of the old people. Bessie had never thought of Harvey in any other light than that of a dear friend and relative, and, since her intimacy with George Howard, had seemed almost oblivious of his existence. And, though Harvey had loved Bessie with a far different love than that of a cousin or a brother, he had been obliged to be content with this.

In little over the five minutes Bessie had given herself, she stood at the block toward which Harvey led the prancing horses, and in less than five minutes more they were galloping away over the smooth, hard road toward the old church.

For a mile, no word was spoken; then, as Harvey adjusted his bridle, he said,—

"I suppose you saw the new-married couple this morning, Bessie?"

How thankful the girl was, that just then the nervous system of Black Queen was so very much shocked, by a cow that lazily rose from a fence corner, that for the next few minutes she demanded all of Bessie's powers to keep her straight in the road! When both her nerves and Bessie's were quieted, the latter answered quite composedly,—

"Yes. When were they married, Harvey?"

"Last night," he said, watching her closely.

But the dark eyes looked unflinchingly into his, and the red lips did not tremble.

He did not tell her that in his pocket lay hidden the note of invitation which George, to add insult to injury, had sent to him and to her; though it was hard to keep from doing so.

"I expect we will pass them on the road," he said, "for George had to stop at home. Look! there they are just in front of us, Bessie."

Bessie looked; and, in obedience to a sharp stroke of the whip, Black Queen bounded forward swift as a bird. Harvey followed, and the two dashed past the two in the buggy on a mad gallop, Bessie's brown curls floating in the breeze, with the long white plume of her hat above them, her bright eyes dancing, and a touch of scarlet in her cheeks. Harvey sat erect and graceful in his saddle; and George, with his new-made bride beside him, could only think,—

"How proud and happy that fellow looks! and how pretty and bright Bessie Ross is!"

And Bessie thought, too,—

"How handsome Harvey is! Wonder I never noticed it before. And so much better than George," stealing a glance at her "big cousin," that, if he had seen it, would have made his heart beat quicker.

They had reached the church, and dismounted, and were standing in a group of the other young people of the neighborhood, chatting gayly, when George drove up.

Of all the crowd, Bessie was first to congratulate the bride and groom; and there was not a shadow in her eye or a tremor in

her voice as she pronounced the usual "I wish you much joy," though George thought he could detect a slight tinge of sarcasm in it.

Her hand did not tremble when it touched his; but, when it was withdrawn, his hand closed over the plain gold ring he had given her.

For the next two weeks, Harvey did not give Bessie time to think. It seemed to her there never was as many merry-makings in the neighborhood before at that season; and, attended by Harvey, she went to all of them.

Bessie wondered at herself in those days, when she got time to wonder. All the maidens she had ever read of, who had been jilted as she had been, had, as a natural consequence, taken a consumption, and died most interesting deaths. But she saw no signs of it in her case. Her appetite was as good as ever; and she found herself really enjoying the parties and picnics, and very proud of her handsome escort.

"Harvey rides so much better than George ever did; and if he is n't quite so polite, why, he has more heart."

So she would say to herself; and, when she caught herself making such comparisons as these, she jumped at the conclusion that she never really had loved George, after all, — which was not so very far from the truth.

Cunning Harvey saw it all, but wisely kept his thought to himself till his time should come. Cunning grandma saw it all too, and laughed under her big sunbonnet at the way things were turning round to suit her plans after all that trouble about George Howard. But she said nothing either, and Bessie drifted on in delightful ignorance that she was bending her proud little head for the silken noose of love again.

"Bessie," said Harvey, one evening, as he took the brimming milk-pail from her hand at the bars, "what ever became of that pretty gold ring you used to wear? Your hand looks bare without it."

"I — I — lost it," she stammered. "That

is, I mean," bravely now, "I gave it back to George Howard, Harvey. I could n't wear a married man's ring."

Harvey said nothing more just then; but later, when he found her alone on the porch, he took up the little bare brown hand, and — strange act for matter-of-fact Harvey! — held it warily to his lips a moment.

"Too bad this little hand should go bare, Bessie," he said. "I wish you would let it wear this;" and, in the moonlight, she caught the flash of a heavy gold band as it slipped upon her finger.

With her heart fluttering like a frightened bird, she looked up into the honest, earnest blue eyes, but spoke no word.

"I have had that ring, Bessie," he went on, "ever since your birthday; but, before I had a chance to give it you, George had put his ring on your finger, and I would not offer it. I thought at first I would throw it away, but then concluded I would wait. I loved you then, Bessie, and I love you still. I don't ask you to say anything now, little girl; but think over it tonight, and, if you have the ring on tomorrow, I shall know you love me, and will some day be my wife."

And he left her alone in the moonlight, where for an hour she sat gazing vacantly at the ring. Harvey loved her. Harvey wanted her to be his wife. Harvey had loved her so long. And with this thought came a burst of happy tears, and Bessie Ross knew her own heart.

And in the morning, as Harvey came to the kitchen-door before breakfast, and watched those busy little hands rolling out dough, and fashioning biscuit, he saw his ring gleaming there, and, careless of who might be looking, he caught the little figure, kitchen apron and all, close to his heart.

Grandma put her head out of the pantry just then, but drew it back again so quickly they never knew that the glad old blue eyes saw that stolen kiss, brimful of happiness.

And thus was the heart of sweet Bessie Ross caught in the rebound.

CLARE'S MISSION.

EMMA MORTIMER BABSON

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CLARE'S MISSION.

BY EMMA MORTIMER BABSON.

The opera season had ended; everybody complained that it was too short. No one had had half enough of "La Favorita" and "Lucia di Lammermoor." It was shameful—when the troupe was so splendid, too! Only Clare Rivers said nothing. She was the belle and beauty of her set.

"Is n't it shameful, Clare?" asked Madge Deveraux. "Only a stay of six weeks here! As if that satisfied us Bostonians! Goodness, girl! why don't you rave?"

Madge was exasperated,—Clare sat looking so listlessly from the window.

There were half a dozen of them in Clare's little *boudoir*: Harry Bertram and Fred Vere, New York theatrical critiques,—her cousins; Vivian Amber, Effie Somers, Charlie Deveraux and his sister.

"I don't think that I care much," said Clare, quietly.

"Let them rave—let them rave," hummed Harry Bertram, touching the strings of Clare's harp.

"Why! why don't you care, Clare?" cried Madge.

"I don't know," answered Clare, quietly.

"Why, Clare, you look as though you 'd put on the weeping-willow for somebody."

"I have—for myself—for my own sins," answered Clare Rivers, with sudden forced gayety, as she sprang up and seated herself at the piano. "But let us see what we can do for ourselves in an operative way. Here's the 'Phantom Chorus.' Sing!"

There were some chords in that blending of youthful voices which the opera company could not have surpassed. Clare Rivers, herself, never sang so well,—with such inspired intensity. Charlie Deveraux's eyes were fixed on her.

She left the piano with the fitfulness with which she had placed herself before it.

"Play again, Clare," pleaded Harry Bertram.

"No," she answered, imperiously, and seated herself upon the cushions of the window-seat. They all stood about the piano, looking over the music. Deveraux slipped away, and came to the window.

"What is the matter, Clare?" he said, in a low voice.

"I'm tired."

She looked up at him, and he saw her eyes under the long lashes, heavy with pain. He touched the little unresisting hand on her lap. A flush swept over her face.

"Stay at home tonight. I want to see you," he said.

"Well," quietly.

Something apathetic settled over her face after he had turned away. They called her; she rose, slowly.

"Play for us once more before we go," pleaded the gay party.

She sat down at the piano and commenced "Departed Days."

"Horrors! that horrible dirge-like thing! Please don't, Clare," cried Madge.

After a moment she played a heavy, dissonant march. The party left, unable to utter their usual encomiums.

When they had gone, she went back to the window. The February snow lay thick on the outer ledge, a glittering crust over it. The same icy snow lay in patches on the park; the trees were bare,—the north wind souged through them. The sky was steely blue.

But she saw nothing with her blank, fixed eyes. Their panorama shifted unseen. Clare had never felt so much and so little in all her life as she did that day.

There came a soft knock at the door; and a moment after a handsome face looked in.

"Alone, Clare?" and the handsome face was followed by a graceful body, stylishly done up. He came forward pulling his fair mustache, — Clare's cousin, Fred Vere.

"I slipped away from Harry, at the corner, and came back," he said, laughingly, throwing himself into a *fauteuil*. Clare only looked at him absently. He rose, wheeled his chair to her side, and sat down again, taking her hand, and playing with her rings.

"I wish you were n't my cousin, Clare; I'd make love to you," he said.

A frown contracted her white forehead.

"Why would you do that?" she said, suddenly.

"Oh, for the sake of something new under the sun, Clare," confidentially; "the world bores me terribly."

"Fred, don't for Heaven's sake say such contemptible things to me!" she exclaimed, angrily. "Bored by the world,—you, a man! If you did your duty by the world, the world would do its duty by you."

"Don't scold a fellow, Clare. Upon honor, I'm a pretty good boy now. Well, there's not much chance of my being anything else on newspaper reporter's pay. Since the governor failed, and my grays went to the devil"—

"They did n't go as fast as if you had driven them, Fred. I shall send you away now, for I have an engagement. And don't let Harry come up this evening; I have another."

"Nor come myself. *Au revoir*, sweet! Don't scold me when I come to see you again."

He kissed her hand, and disappeared. In an instant she heard him run down the stone steps of the house.

She locked the door of the room, and lay down upon a lounge. Her engagement was only with herself. She was sick to the soul of her conventional life; its *gayeties* were dust and ashes to her. Yet she saw no release. Her life had run in one groove ever since she could remember, and she saw no way of getting out of it.

All that weary afternoon's thought came to little. She was lingering over the common stumbling-block,—her mission. What was it? As if true work lay not neglected at her hand every day,—in the use of her wealth, in the hearts of her friends, in the influence of her womanhood. She had never heard Bayard Taylor say,—

"Vex me not with weary questions,
Seek no moral to deduce.

With the present I am busy,
With the future hold a truce;
If I live the life he gives me,
God will turn it to his use."

Evening came, and with it Charlie Deveraux. They all called him so, for the genial eyes and frank smile. But there were

hidden depths in his eyes, and in his life also.

He could not talk long with Clare without coming to her state. He smiled.

"What did you tell Fred this afternoon?" he asked.

"I do not remember."

"To do his duty by the world, and the world will do its duty by him," He told me, laughing; said you scolded him."

"I remember."

"Practice as you preach, and all will be well; for your admonition applies equally to yourself, dear Clare. You find fault with life as it comes to you. Live it truly, and you will find its use."

"But what shall I do? What is my mission, Charlie?"

The earnest eyes dropped suddenly from her face. Charlie Deveraux's assured bearing slightly faltered. Then he looked up and went on again.

"Perhaps your specialty will come to you some day, Clare. For the present, I think your scope is wide enough to work very usefully in. Strive to do your duty from day to day; that is all any of us can do."

He got up from his chair and walked across the floor once or twice, his face very absent in expression. Clare watched him in surprise, but obtained no satisfaction. He stopped and turned toward the door at last.

"I shall see you from time to time; you will tell me your progress. Good-night now;" and he passed out.

Clare sat still in her *fauteuil*, — her cheek on her hand, the gaslight falling on her bowed head, so beautiful with its golden waves of hair. A warm admiration for Charlie Deveraux was thrilling sweetly through her heart, — her eyes grave, deep, and tender.

"So good and handsome!" she murmured to herself. "I wonder" —

She had gained some knowledge of the secret of life, and she became better and happier for it. Whether or not in her first conscientiousness of self, and her crude attempts to better her daily influence, she really gained much satisfaction, is an open question; but she surely found relief from the curse of *ennui* in continual industry, and gradually, as she grew to understand herself better, she discovered the secret of true happiness.

A week from the night Charlie Deveraux

had spent an evening with her, a report that his father had failed spread through her circle. In three days it was verified; the house was to be sold, and the family were going into the country. Clare's freshly awakened conscience felt her duty imperatively; she called upon the unfortunate family.

"Charlie was just planning to go into business for himself; it's so hard!" sobbed Mrs. Deveraux.

"Make me the least of your troubles, mother," replied Charlie. "I had given up that plan. I gave it up a week ago, when I replied to Abraham Lincoln's call for seventy-five thousand men, by enlisting in the Federal service."

None turned paler at this announcement than Clare Rivers.

"Enlisted?" was the cry.

"Enlisted for the war," he replied, proudly.

That was when the struggle first commenced, before the red hand of War had searched our ranks so closely. Few men enlisted then who enlisted not for patriotism, and cried their answering "Ay, ay!" to the leader's voice, promptly proud of their loyalty.

Clare knew that Charlie Deveraux had taken this step from principle, but she did not dream then how much it cost him.

The family had removed out of town before he went away. Before he went to Washington, he came in town to say good-by to Clare. So brave and good, going away to be shot down, — how her heart swelled!

"I believe it to be my duty," he said, standing before her. "There is a sacred sweetness in doing one's duty, Clare; perhaps you had found out that."

"Yes."

He took her hand.

"Don't forget me," he said.

She could not look up at him, — her eyes were so heavy with tears.

"Good-by! and God bless you!"

Those were his last words.

If in her last, swift glance at his face, Clare read his secret, no word betrayed the revelation. But something glad in her presence, during the following months, vitalized the hearts of those about her to fresh love and admiration.

May passed. Ah! 't was the last May — sunny, blue-skied, golded-blossomed —

which many brave eyes ever saw in this, the lower country. Spring was gone. The June rosebuds were swelling with bloom and fragrance when there came news of death and disaster. The battle of Big Bethel was fought,—sixteen killed, forty wounded. The number was few, compared to the wholesale battles we have had since; but how many panting hearts awaited for the tidings!

At length a telegram was flashed to the Deveraux.

"Charles Deveraux, severely wounded. In hospital at Fortress Monroe."

Clare heard of it that evening. She tossed upon her bed all night, as if it were heated sheet-iron. The next morning she met Madge and Mrs. Deveraux in town. They were going to the hospital. How Clare envied them!

Mrs. Deveraux was weighed down with the thought that they should not meet him alive; but Madge kept up a brave heart.

"What do you send him, Clare?" she asked, promptly.

"I have nothing but my love. Give him that, Madge," Clare answered, and turned away to murmur, "My love!—my love! will he understand?"

But Madge took the message unconscious of any peculiar meaning; Clare and Charlie had been good friends so long; it was unremarkable enough. She went; and Clare watched and waited, living breathlessly until she heard the verdict of life or death.

Finally a telegram came to the waiting father; Charlie was alive, but his right arm had been amputated, and he was very low and weak from loss of blood. But they were to attempt bringing him home in a few weeks.

It was growing hot weather. Clare's rooms waited for her at the hotel at Cape May, but she did not go to them. She remained in the city.

It was the first of July when they brought him home. A cool, quiet country chamber awaited his convalescence. In a little while he came down, weak and weary, into the sitting-room, and looked through the windows at the corn-fields and woods, and at the mignonette and carnations growing in the beds beside the walk of the front yard. He would sit for hours, looking at the waving of the distant woods.

One day he said,—

"May I not have some company?"

"Whom do you wish to see, Charlie?" asked Madge.

"Clare Rivers."

So they sent for her, and she came, laughing at being so honored as to be the first visitor, but so pale that they all noticed it.

"You have been sick too, Clare?" asked Charlie.

"No," she said.

They sat together all the long afternoon,—the quietly happy family, with the regained treasure in their midst, he looking quietly at the cheerful faces, and smiling faintly at the merry jests, but seeming to have withal a strange content which nothing could disturb. His eyes rested oftenest on Clare, but she seldom looked at him. She sat on a low seat by Madge, busy with Shetland wools.

By and by Madge said,—

"Why don't you talk to Clare, Charlie?"

"Because I want to look at her."

"And can't you do both?"

"Not so well."

So they let him alone in his contented quiet. At last his eyes wandered off to the waving woods. Clare looked up, and looked at him. His face was very white and thin, but it was the same face, with the clear eyes, broad brow, and smiling mouth. The same manly depth in the eyes; the same boyish fall of the fair hair. He lay back in the great chair; the clear-cut profile sharpened by suffering, outlined against the chintz back of the chair; the right arm gone near the shoulder. All her infinite pride, compassion, love,—ay, love,—was in Clare's eyes when he turned suddenly and looked into them. She bent over her work dizzily.

A moment, and then he said,—

"Clare, I want to talk to you now. Will you come here?"

She came quietly, and sat down on a low seat beside him, still busy with her Shetland wools. Mrs. Deveraux had gone to see about getting tea. Madge was upon the gravel walk, gathering flowers for Clare to take home. They were alone.

"When I went away I loved you, Clare. I had planned to make my circumstances such that I could make this known to you, when the war called me. I felt as if I lost you in going, but it was my duty, and I went. I have come home crippled for life, and am poor. But when I lay maimed and almost dying in the hospital, you sent me

your love. Did you mean little or much, Clare?"

"Much."

"Think. Do you know all the possibilities of life which this misfortune takes from me?"

"Yes. And I am so happy!"

"Why?"

"Because," laying her cheek upon the maimed shoulder, and looking up into the tender eyes. "I have found my true mission."

CROSS-PURPOSES.

BY MISS ELLIS CLARE.

CHAPTER I.

The parish of Burnisfield lies in the very heart of Westmoreland, a little primitive out-of-the-world village, deep-hidden in the fells between Kendal and Bowness.

The Vicarage is a long low ivy-covered house not much larger than a cottage. An old-fashioned garden, full of sweet flowers despised by modern gardeners, lies all around it, divided at the back from the orchard by a straggling thorn hedge and a merry little stream of clear water. The whole place is sweet and fresh and blooming, but straggling and untidy. Indeed it would require two gardeners to keep it in order, while all it has is the chance attendance of the boy-of-all-work, and the still more chance attention of Miss Beatrix Rainsford, the Vicar's eldest daughter.

She was standing now under one of the mossy gnarled old apple-trees in the orchard, a tall slip of a girl, in a plain print dress, the sunlight playing in gleams and flashes on her bright brown head and blithe young face. A coarse straw hat lay at her feet, together with a large basket half full of ripe-red currants. A tall youth stood before her. He was very tall, in that ungainly stage of development which is all legs and arms. His face—tanned and freckled to a good standing red-brown—was long and lantern-jawed, with scarcely anything redeeming about in it except a pair of bright blue eyes and an expression of frank good-humor and shrewd sense about the mouth. His attitude was embarrassed, and he glanced with some vexation from a bunch of superb roses in his hand to the face of the girl before him.

"I thought you would like them," he was saying, in a disappointed tone.

"So I do," was the reply, in a matter-of-fact voice. "Only it was silly of you to walk eight miles in this broiling hot sun just to get me some roses."

"You know I would do a great deal more than that to please you," he said, with a somewhat reproachful glance.

Miss Beatrix raised her dark eyebrows with a little perverse gesture.

"It would have pleased me a great deal better if you had stayed here and helped me to pick the currants," she said ungratefully. "Look, I have picked only half a basketful yet, and I am quite tired with stooping, and Hall is waiting for them; she has got the sugar all weighed and the preserving-pan out, and there are no currants ready."

Young Westbrook looked penitent, as if it had been his fault that the currants were not forthcoming.

"I am very sorry," he said. "If I had known you wanted me, of course I should have come."

"Well, it cannot be helped," returned the girl, in a much-aggrieved voice; "only I quite relied upon you, and it"—

"It is not too late yet," he interrupted energetically. "You have not half enough. Sit down here in the shade, and pick the stalks from these, while I get another basketful. Where is the old brown basket?"

"In the garden-shed. Shall I come with you?"—taking a reluctant step forward.

"No, thanks. Stay where you are. I shall have the currants in no time."

In another moment the tall, long-limbed young fellow was striding away across the orchard. Trix sat down on the cool mossy grass, and, very well content with the division of labor, began to strip the currants from the stalks.

"It was kind of him after all," she thought, with a slight pang of self-reproach, as she took up the roses, which he had laid on the top of the currants; "only it was foolish."

She sighed somewhat impatiently, and leant back against the apple-tree in a most unwonted fit of meditation.

Six months before, Sydney Westbrook had come to Burnisfield to read with her father, who supplemented his meagre stipend of one hundred and fifty pounds a year by preparing pupils for the universities. Sydney was one of the four now in charge. They had rooms at one or other of the cottages in the village; but their studies were pursued at the Vicarage, and generally the whole of their leisure time was spent there

as well. From the first month of his appearance Sydney had been Miss Rainsford's devoted slave. He was always ready to fetch and carry for her, to hunt up books and flowers for her gratification, and obey the thousand and one caprices which she displayed for his benefit. She was seventeen, he was about a year older; but, with all the arrogance of girlish importance, she considered him quite a boy, and tyrannized over him most unmercifully, taking every advantage of his devotion and loyalty, and repaying it with a sort of capricious regard and careless good-will, treating him with the same frank unceremoniousness and freedom she accorded to her own brothers, but tyrannizing over him in a manner no brother would have submitted to for an instant.

In about half an hour Sydney returned, bearing a huge basket heaped up with fruit. Trix was still under the cool shadows of the apple-tree.

"There," he said, putting down the basket by her side and throwing himself at full length on the grass, "I think you and Hall will be satisfied now."

"It is very kind of you," returned Trix, in much more gracious tones than usual. "If you had only not gone after those foolish roses! It was stupid of you."

"I wish you would not mention them again," he said, with some vehemence. "If they do not please you, throw them away."

"Very well," she answered, going on with her occupation with an air of supreme indifference. "I don't care, if you do not."

An expression of impatience crossed his boyish sunburnt face, but he did not reply. He lay on the grass for some minutes in silence, thinking what a pretty picture she made, with the sunlight shadows coming and going on her face, with its clear-cut delicate features, dark sweet eyes, and high-spirited piquant expression. Her hair shone like burnished gold, and her slight slim figure showed to advantage in the pretty simple dress. Presently he spoke again, with an earnest glance into her face.

"I want to tell you something," he said. "Do you know that I shall leave Burnside in a fortnight?"

"Leave Burnside?" echoed Trix, a slight accent of dismay in her voice. "Do you mean for good?"

"Yes, I fear so. I had a letter from my

uncle this morning, in which he says I must meet him in London on the twenty-third to settle some family business, and then it is arranged, he says, that I am to go to Heidelberg for six months, and after Christmas to Oxford."

"Oh!" uttered Trix, with a doubtful face, but picking her fruit industriously.

"You see," the lad went on earnestly, "I ought to have been at Oxford now, and I shall have to work very hard to make up for it. I have my own way to make in the world. I believe I have only just sufficient money to give me a fair start in some profession; but" —

"What profession shall you choose?" asked Trix, with curiosity.

"I should like to be a barrister, but it will depend a good deal on my uncle. I have seen him only once in my life, but, as he is my only near relative, I suppose I shall have to consult him."

"Yes, of course," agreed Trix abstractedly. "What is he like?"

"I have no idea. He is a soldier, and has been in India for fifteen years. Trixie, you will not forget me when I am gone?" And he looked into her face with beseeching eyes.

"No, of course not," said Trix briskly, as she threw her last handful of picked currants into the basket; "I never forget my friends."

"I wish," began the young fellow hesitatingly, and then he stopped short, looking at her with his bright, eloquent eyes.

"Will you promise?" —

"No; don't ask me to promise, for I never perform," interrupted Trix, jumping up hastily from the grass. "Do help me to carry these currants in, — Hall will be quite frantic."

"But tell me first" —

"No, no, no! O Sydney! for goodness' sake don't get sentimental! I am sorry you are going, — we have been such chums; but, if you press me to promise eternal friendship and everlasting remembrance, and all that sort of thing, I tell you plainly you will only worry me."

"I know, if I did expect everlasting remembrance, I should be uncommonly disappointed," returned the lad bitterly, a flush of pain on his thin face; "but if you will promise for only two years" —

"I have a very short memory," interposed Trix, with frank candor; "but I

think I shall not forget you in two years. So, now that is settled, do help me with the currants."

And, totally heedless of, or at least ignoring, the very unsatisfied expression on his face, she took up her basket and walked off to the house.

The twenty-second day of July, a hot summer afternoon, the very air drowsy with heat, the bees droning lazily from flower to flower, and even the birds chirping in a sleepy monotone.

Miss Beatrix Rainsford sat under her favorite old apple-tree in the orchard, fanning herself with her big straw hat; her brother Jack, her senior by three years, and a brown-faced edition of her own sweet self, sat perched in an uncomfortable position on one of the crooked branches above her, threatening every moment to slide bodily down on to her.

"But what did you say to him, Trix?" he was asking, in a slightly aggravated voice.

"I don't know, Jack. I don't think I said anything."

"What nonsense, Trix! If you want me to see Westbrook, you must tell me plainly what passed between you."

"Well, Jack, the only thing I recollect clearly is that I cried."

"Cried?" exclaimed Jack; and, taking a sudden spring from his perch, he landed on the grass at his sister's feet, where he disposed himself at full length, and stared critically into her face.

"Yes, cried; I could not help it,—he was so desperately in earnest, and I was so— Well, the long and short of it is, I cried;" and Trix stopped with a nervous little laugh that sounded as if tears were suspiciously near.

"But cannot you tell me anything else? All this is so very vague."

"Is it? Cannot you imagine something, Jack?"

"Oh, yes! I can imagine a great deal," retorted Jack dryly; "but just now I prefer facts to fancies."

"I wish you would not stare so," was the explosive rejoinder; and Trix put her straw hat between her flushed face and Jack's scrutinizing eyes, and then continued, in a voice of exasperation, "Have I not told you that I met Sydney Westbrook last night as I came from the school-house,

and that he turned back with me, and—and?"

"Well?" queried Jack significantly, as she stopped short, blushing vividly.

"We walked to the turn of the lane, and then—and he—then he—well, in plain English, he proposed to me!"

"What did you do?" catechized Jack relentlessly.

"I laughed. It was very rude, I know; but it seemed so irresistibly comical that I laughed till the tears came into my eyes. And he said I was heartless; and then I cried—and I think that was all," concluded Trix tragically, "for just then you turned the corner and I had to go."

"But you must have said something, Trix," persisted Jack, jumping up.

"Why, he is only a boy, Jack—a mere boy!"

"You may call him a boy if you like, Trix," said Jack warmly; "but at any rate he is older than you, and a downright good fellow too. You have been exceedingly foolish and thoughtless."

"Thoughtless!" cried Trix, throwing away her hat, and showing a pair of sparkling eyes and a flushed sweet face. "How could I help it? I had no idea he cared for me in that way,—at least"—correcting herself—"how could I tell he was going to be so stupid? And he was so dreadfully, so horribly in earnest, and pleaded so hard, that I never said a word. Indeed I had no time; for in the midst of it all you appeared; and he just whispered that he should come for my answer this afternoon, when you came up."

"Why cannot you see him yourself, Trix?"

"I cannot," Trix said, hesitatingly, and with sudden humility; "I should laugh or cry again; and I don't know which would be the worst."

"Well, what am I to say to him?" demanded Jack coolly.

There was a short silence. Trix kept her eyes fixed steadfastly on the purple pansies on her muslin dress, but did not answer.

"There is only one answer possible," spoke up Jack at length, watching his sister keenly.

"Yes," said Trix, not raising her eyes.

There was another interval of silence. Jack kept his eyes fixed on his sister's face, where a vivid blush was burning from chin

to brow. At last he put one hand on her arm, and spoke more seriously than he had yet done, —

"Trix, anything else would be utterly ridiculous, as you said."

"Yes," assented Trix again, in a low voice.

"I grant you he is one of the best fellows I know," pursued Jack; "but there is such a thing as common sense, and" —

"Yes," said Trix, springing up suddenly from the grass. "Did I say there was not? O Jack! what a blighted being he will be!"

Jack gazed at his sister in bewilderment, not knowing what to make of her contradictory moods.

"There he is!" she cried excitedly, as a tall figure was seen making his way through the wilderness of shrubs and trees. "Jack, on your honor, you will not laugh at him?"

"No, I promise you. I tell you honestly I have no taste for the task, but I will do him the justice to treat it seriously."

And Jack walked away with an air of sober propriety very different from the ordinary expression of his merry, careless face.

Left to herself, Trix spent the next half-hour in wandering restlessly up and down the orchard, but finished up by sitting down under the old tree, and in sheer absence of mind throwing away a heap of half-ripe pears and apples which with considerable labor she had collected for the old pony some days before.

It seemed to be hours before Jack's step came through the orchard again.

"Well?" she cried, turning eagerly round as he appeared.

Jack looked very grave as he came and stood before her.

"I have done as you wished, Trix, and he is gone," he said briefly.

"Is that all you have to tell me?" cried the girl impetuously. "What did he say? How did he look?"

"He looked just the same as usual, and he said very little; but he quite agreed with you that any other decision would have been impossible, was the answer, in a dry, matter-of-fact way.

"Oh!" said Trix, in a dubious voice; then, after an interval of silence, "Thank you, Jack; you have been very kind." She turned to go into the house, and he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

CHAPTER II.

Five years had sped away, bringing great changes at the Vicarage at Burnside. The Vicar was dead, and the old home broken up. Light-hearted Jack was trying his fate among the Japanese at Yokohama, the younger children were dispersed in all directions, and Trix, a little more sober, but not much wiser, was tasting the bitters and sweets of life as a governess. Not many of the bitters had fallen to her share, for Mrs. Rangely was an old friend, the children were specially nice, and Ellerage — one of the prettiest places about Burnside — was only a few miles from her old home.

It was holiday-time now. Miss Rainsford's small pupils were running wild, rioting in their liberty, setting their young governess's authority completely at defiance, and following their own sweet wills from morn till night, — in all of which they were most mischievously aided and abetted by "Uncle Arthur," otherwise Captain Gresham, Mrs. Rangeley's sailor-brother, whose leave of absence was being spent at Ellerage, and who delighted in nothing so much as inciting the whole troop of children to all the mutiny and mischief their united heads could devise.

Trix made one or two efforts to keep her unruly subjects in order, but all to no purpose, till a gentle "Let them alone, my dear, — I like them to run wild in their holidays," from Mrs. Rangely quieted her conscience, and let her free to follow her own devices.

"Ten from Staveley, five from Burnside, sixteen from Kendal, and seven from Old Mill. How many is that, Miss Rainsford?"

"Thirty-eight," interposed Captain Gresham promptly, looking across the breakfast-table at a pile of notes Mrs. Rangeley was sorting.

"Then there is the party from Rocklands — five or six — and Laura and Alice Felton."

"Forty-five or forty-six," commented the captain, *sotto voce*.

"The Eskdales will stay with us, of course. Seven and" —

"Oh, my dear," interrupted Mr. Rangeley, looking up from his newspaper, "while I remember, I wish you would send an invitation to young Carlisle."

Little Mrs. Rangeley looked up smiling, —

she was a merry, brisk little lady, with a kind, motherly face.

"Certainly," she said, "if you will tell me who young Carlisle is."

"General Carlisle's nephew,—the new people who have come to Scarswood. I saw him at the county meeting yesterday," replied Mr. Rangeley, returning again to his paper, and becoming immersed in "the Eastern Question."

"Short but satisfactory," said Mrs. Rangeley, looking across at Trix with a smile. "Another note for you to write, Miss Rainsford! Arthur, how many will that be altogether?"

"Feltons, Rocklands, Eskdales, and a new recruit—I have lost count," answered Captain Gresham, laughing, "especially as the last may turn out to be a host in himself,—may he not, Miss Rainsford?"

"Don't distract one so, Arthur," said Mrs. Rangeley, jotting down the numbers on the back of an envelope. "Fifty, I make it. Then"—with a glance round the table—"there are ourselves,—four."

"Oh, but I cannot go!" exclaimed Trix, looking up in alarm.

"Oh, but you can, so no rebellion!" was the kindly authoritative reply.

"But there will be so many people, and I know scarcely any one," said Trix, hesitating, not caring to confess that her pride and sensitiveness stood in the way. "I am only the governess," she thought with proud humility.

"My dear," said Mrs. Rangeley kindly, "you go as my friend, remember, and at my 'gypsy tea' we all leave our trades and professions behind. Besides, I am counting on your help as prime minister, and you must not disappoint me." Then with a reassuring smile,—*"Now will you go and write the note to Mr. Carlisle, so that it may go by the early post?"*

Ordered off in this half-bantering, half-commanding style, Trix had no choice but to obey. When the door had closed upon her, Mrs. Rangeley turned to her brother.

"Arthur," she said, "I wish you would take Miss Rainsford under your wing a little. I want her to enjoy her holidays, but she is proud and shy, and over-sensitive about her position, and will mope away in the school-room by herself."

"Of course I will," replied the Captain good-naturedly. "What can I do?"

"Oh, anything you like, so that she does

not plue away by herself! She will keep in the background, and is quite morbid on the subject of remembering her station, as she calls it. I shall have my hands full when the Eskdales come, and shall have no time to drag her out whether she will or no."

"All right, I will look after her," declared the Captain. And he kept his word a good deal more literally than his sister had ever expected.

Mrs. Rangeley's "gypsy tea" in Scout's Scar Wood was an annual affair,—as much a matter of course as the meeting of Parliament. It always took place at the end of May, when the lilies-of-the-valley are in full bloom, to gather lilies being the chief end and aim of the festivity. And in all England they grow nowhere perhaps as they do in Scout's Scar Wood. There are thousands upon thousands of them nestling down among the rocks on the steep hill-side, under the shelter of the trees; throughout the whole wood is "a carpet of delicate bells as fair as the fabulous asphodels."

The day of the *fete* was a brilliant May day, the sweet-springing flowers gleaming in the sunshine. The party was scattered about in picturesque groups among the trees, sitting on the low rocks and logs of wood. Mrs. Rangeley's tea-table, a considerable advance upon a gypsy's tripod and black kettle, formed a sort of nucleus from which radiated cups of tea and coffee and plates of provisions to the outside circle.

Almost the last to arrive were Laura and Alice Felton, two very pretty fair girls. With them came a tall, fine-looking man, the young Carlisle whom Mr. Rangeley had mentioned.

Tea was in full progress. Captain Gresham, giving his sister's request the widest interpretation, had constituted himself Trix's cavalier. He had discovered a nook among the rocks, where he had ensconced himself with her, with cups of coffee, a basket of strawberries, and enough provisions for a small army, declaring laughingly, when she remonstrated, that "there was corn in Egypt," and he did not mean to starve.

Trix took off her broad-brimmed hat and leant back in her rocky nook, thoroughly enjoying the brightness and beauty around her, the sweet spring day, and the merry banter and fun of the light-hearted Captain. She looked exquisitely lovely in her simple white dress of thick-corded muslin, in

which she had fastened bunches of the delicate lilies with their broad, cool leaves, her face piquant and spirited, her dark eyes full of vivacity, as she answered her companion's jests with quick repartee.

After a while little Elsie Rangeley came with a message from Mrs. Rangeley, — "Uncle Arthur is wanted." With a parting "I will not be a moment; don't let any one steal the strawberries," Captain Gresham went off to obey the summons. Trix kept her seat, and, taking up her hat, began to fasten some of her lilies in the velvet band, thinking, with a smile on her face, of the captain's merry blue eyes and audacious compliments.

She was interrupted by Mrs. Rangeley's voice.

"Oh, here you are, Miss Rainsford! I have brought an old friend to see you, who says you have quite forgotten him."

Trix looked up wonderingly. A tall, broad-shouldered young fellow stood by Mrs. Rangeley, glancing down at her with an air of complete acquaintanceship.

"I am very sorry, but I do not remember you at all," she said, frankly.

"Don't you?" he answered with a smile. "Then I fear your memory is as short as you predicted, for you guaranteed it to last for only two years."

With a puzzled face Trix took a full and comprehensive survey of her unrecognized friend. He was very tall, with a magnificent figure, strong and athletic; a pleasant face, much bronzed by the sun, the lower part almost hidden by a beard of soft tawny brown; his hair, of a darker shade, cropped to regulation brevity, and his eyes — Trix had just reached them in her mental survey when she recognized him. There was no mistaking those clear, steady, blue eyes. It was her old youthful admirer, Sydney Westbrook.

"Syd — Mr. Westbrook! How glad I am to see you again!" she cried, impulsively jumping up and holding out her hand to him.

"And I you," he replied, with a smile; "but you see my memory has held out three years longer than yours."

"Ah, but you are so altered! I can scarcely believe it is really you. When did you come? Are you staying here? Where have you been all these years?"

"You have not forgotten your bad habit of asking a dozen questions in a breath,"

he answered, mischievously. "Which shall I answer first?"

"All of them," she retorted, with a bright look, her dark eyes sparkling. "Ah, it is like the merry old times to see you again! It seems five centuries, five long centuries instead of years, since the old Burnside days."

"Five years is a long time," he said; "though I never realized it thoroughly till I came back here. Nothing is the same."

"No," she assented, her bright face clouding, her eyes sad. "Do you know — have you heard about papa?"

"Yes," he replied, with grave sympathy: "I wish I could tell you how sorry I am."

There was a short silence, thoughts coming thick and fast, — so much had happened, so many changes had taken place, since the two had stood together, boy and girl, under the old apple-tree in the orchard at Burnside.

"I went round by the old Vicarage the other day," he said at last; "I thought I should like to see the old place again."

"Did you?" questioned Trix, with brightening eyes. "I have not been for two years, — since — Is it altered?"

"You would not know it. The new Vicar has had a grand house built for himself, and the old place is let to two bachelors."

"Yes, I know," said Trix. "What is it like?"

"Most overpoweringly neat," he answered, laughing; "not a rose-leaf out of place. The old straggling orchard hedge has been rooted out, and a line of prim green palings put up; even the little burn seems trained to ripple with propriety; and your old mossy apple-tree is cut down."

"O dear!" sighed Trix, regretfully. "I am sorry. What dear old times we used to have under the apple-tree!"

"Yes," he agreed. "I think they might have spared it for the sake of 'auld lang syne.' How does Jack like Yokohama?"

"Very much: he is quite enthusiastic."

And with that they plunged into a host of reminiscences and chronicles. Through it all Trix was conscious of a feeling of disappointment; Sydney Westbrook was altered, — and whether for better or worse she could not determine. He was kind and pleasant in manner, friendly, cordial, and deferential; but he seemed quite to have forgotten his devotion of former days, and

Trix had recognized before ten minutes had passed that she could no more tyrannize over and command him as she had done long since than she could change the fine-looking, determined man beside her into the tall, awkward stripling she remembered so well.

"But you have not answered any of my questions yet," she said, a little shyly, when the Burnside chronicles were exhausted. "You have not told me anything about yourself. Did you go to Heidelberg and Oxford? and are you a barrister, Mr. Westbrook?"

"I think I have been half over the world," he replied, lazily, "Heidelberg included." Then, with a slight laugh, "Yes, I am a full-fledged barrister, if eating some dozens of dinners in the Temple and holding one solitary brief constitute a barrister. But I have left London now, and given up my profession."

"Oh!" replied Trix, not liking to ask the reason why, but wondering why he did not volunteer a fuller explanation. "Are you staying here in the neighborhood?"

He glanced at her with a slight expression of surprise.

"Yes," he said: "at Scarswood, General Carlisle's place. I" —

"I know," she interposed. "They have come lately. Are they friends of yours?"

"I should imagine so," he replied, with a suspicion of laughter, "since I" —

"And young Mr. Carlisle," she interrupted, inquisitively, — "Mr. Rangeley makes him out to be such a paragon, — is he your friend too?"

Trix was still sitting on the low ledge of rocks; young Westbrook had thrown himself on the grass at her feet. As she spoke his blue eyes glanced up into her face with mischievous merriment.

"The very greatest," he said, with a sort of comical gravity. "Don't you know him?"

"No: I heard Mr. Rangeley say he came with the Feltons, and is very popular. But then he is so dreadfully rich, and that covers a multitude of sins."

"What particular frailties do you suspect him of, Miss Rainsford?" he asked, the amusement on his face visibly increasing.

"Mine is only a general suspicion of all paragons," she said, laughing lightly. "But I know I should dislike him."

"Why?" he asked, with a curious look.

"For half a dozen reasons, all equally frivolous. Are you great friends?"

"We could not possibly be greater," he replied, with another comical glance. "May I not introduce him to you?"

"Not on any account," said Trix, resolutely.

"Would it startle you very much to hear," he was beginning gravely, when steps were heard close by, and in another moment Captain Gresham appeared round the corner of the rock, with Laura and Alice Felton. Young Westbrook jumped up hastily, and Alice Felton, seating herself on the stones by Trix, said, with placid graciousness, —

"What a charming little secluded nook, Miss Rainsford! We could not imagine where you had disappeared to."

"Could you not?" questioned Trix, coldly. She had no great love for Alice Felton, who of late years had contrived to forget their girlish friendship. "I did not suppose any one would notice my absence."

"Do not imagine you are of such small consequence," said Alice, with a disagreeable smile that contradicted her words, and a look at Sydney Westbrook that stung Trix to the quick.

He was standing a little apart, talking to Laura in a low tone; she was looking up at him, with an expression of absorbed interest in her pretty, fair face and childlike eyes, the color coming and going in her pink cheeks as she raised a pair of confiding, trustful eyes to his. Presently they moved off together, and Trix saw them go slowly up the wood, apparently in earnest conversation, and seemingly quite engrossed with each other.

"What a handsome couple they will be!" said Alice, looking after them. "We are all much pleased about it."

"About what?" asked Trix, indifferently.

"Laura and Mr. Carlisle. You see," went on Alice, with an assumption of most confidential friendship, "it is almost as good as settled. He is extremely well off, and Scarswood is a lovely place, and" —

"But what has Sydney Westbrook to do with it?" interrupted Trix.

"Sydney Westbrook!" cried Alice, opening her eyes to their full extent. "Why, Sydney Westbrook is Mr. Carlisle!"

"What?" cried Trix, sharply.

"Why, I thought everybody knew!" cried

Alice, looking at her curiously. "He took the name of Carlisle by his uncle's wish, when he came of age three years ago. Surely you must have heard?"

"No, I have not," said Trix, still scarcely believing the story.

"His uncle adopted him," continued Alice. "General Carlisle is an old Indian officer, — a most charming old gentleman, but rather formidable. It will be delightful to stay at Scarswood when Laura is married."

Alice talked on for some time, but Trix heard no more. She turned hot and cold with indignation. Sydney had deceived, insulted her; not only withheld his confidence from her, but suffered her ignorance to make her a laughing-stock to others. Her friend, her own old friend, from whom she had not hidden a thought or deed! She had spoken so freely, so frankly, of her own concerns, and he had repaid her by absolute silence as to his; nay, he had misled her, and allowed her to believe what, if not actually false, was still far from the truth.

"I will never forgive him," she thought, with passionate anger, "never! He has mocked me, misled me, and laughed at me."

In a tumult of bitter indignation she jumped up from her seat, and, cutting short Alice Felton's spiteful platitudes with an explosion of angry sarcasm, rushed away down the first path she came to, and hid herself in the depths of the wood.

The rest of the day passed somehow, — it was all a blank to Beatrix Rainsford. When the time came for returning home, and the party was breaking up, Sydney came up to say good-by. But Trix by this time had recovered her composure. She put her hand into his, said a few words with the coldest, most ceremonious politeness, and then turned again to Captain Gresham, with a laughing retort to one of his jesting speeches. Sydney looked surprised; but it was no time for explanations. He turned away, and ten minutes afterward was driving down the road, with Laura Felton beside him on the box-seat of the wagonette.

CHAPTER III.

One misty, gray morning in October Miss Rainsford and her pupils were pacing up and down the drive at Ellorage. Everything looked melancholy. Ominous clouds were sweeping down from the mountains in

sheets of mist and vapor; the leaves hung damp and lifeless on the trees. The sunshine and the summer were gone. Trix was in a mood to sympathize with the weather. The world was all going wrong: it was all mistakes and trouble and confusion, and there was no rest anywhere. Mrs. Rangeley was away from home, the children were wild and riotous, Captain Gresham's face looked serious and reproachful, Trix was worried and vexed and sorrowful, and Mr. Carlisle was going to be married to Laura Felton.

Into the five months that had elapsed since Mrs. Rangeley's *fete* it seemed to Trix as if all the vexation and trouble of a century had been crowded. Visitors had been plentiful at Ellorage, and she was proud and shy, and on the look-out for slights. With the rest had come Sydney Carlisle. Mrs. Rangeley liked him: Mr. Rangely and he seemed to have endless subjects in common. Trix had seen him very seldom, contriving to avoid him whenever possible; and, when compelled to recognize his presence, according him the stiffest and most chilling reception. Several times he had made an effort to break through all restraints and come to an explanation; but Trix, still angry and resentful, was on her guard, and thwarted him at all points.

So on this morning Trix was pacing up and down the avenue in a disconsolate mood, for the world was all "out of joint," and everything was wretched and unsatisfactory.

Presently the children set up a shout, and rushed off tumultuously to the gate, which had just been opened to allow a horseman to pass through.

He jumped down when he saw them, and, passing his arm through the bridle, came forward, with the riotous troop dancing round him like wild Indians. It was Mr. Carlisle.

"Good-morning, Miss Rainsford," he said, when at last he got up to her. "How do you manage to keep this rebellious crew of yours in order?"

Trix glanced at the children. Rebellion notwithstanding, she was very fond of them, and they of her.

"We do not trouble ourselves much about the proprieties," she said, coldly. "But, if they annoy you, they shall go in."

"No, no," he said, hastily. "How you do mistake me!" Then he turned to the

children. "Willie, Elsie, who will tell Forbes to come for my horse? and who wants a ride round the stable-yard?"

"I will!" "I do!" cried the eager little voices all together, and away the children scampered, in high glee at the prospect of a ride on Mr. Carlisle's spirited chestnut.

Miss Rainsford turned round, as if about to retrace her steps to the house.

"Do not go in," he said, with an entreating look; "I have not seen you to speak to for so long. Where do you hide yourself?"

Trix murmured something about engagements and her time not being her own, and kept on her way houseward.

"Do you know, Miss Rainsford," he said, walking on by her side, "you do not treat me quite fairly? Surely such old friends as you and I need not be on the ceremonious terms of chance acquaintances."

"I treat my friends according to the place they hold in my estimation," she replied, coldly.

"Then mine must be among the very lowest," he returned, not losing his temper, though her tone was even more ungracious than her words. "You do not err on the side of outspokenness," he went on; "rather the reverse; only sometimes I think you might do me the justice to believe that what concerns you I should like to hear from yourself."

"I do not understand you," she said, avoiding his gaze. "You are speaking in riddles. Nothing has happened to me that would specially interest you."

"It would interest me if it were true," he returned, with a frank cordiality that refused to be provoked by her chilling tone.

"Perhaps you will kindly explain to what you are alluding," she said, with an air of indifference.

"I heard about three weeks ago that you are going to be married to Captain Gresham. Is it true?"

A vivid blush spread over Trix's face; her eyes fell before his. There was just the grain of truth in his words that made it impossible to face him frankly.

"You might have told me," he said, reproachfully, drawing his own conclusions from her confusion. "It is almost too late to congratulate you now."

"Yes," she replied, recovering herself and speaking with cold sarcasm: "I think it is. May I ask who told you of it?"

"Alice Felton. She said it was all arranged."

"Exceedingly kind of Alice Felton, I am sure!" said Trix, raising her eyebrows in supreme scorn.

He looked at her doubtfully. Her moods seem to change like the wind.

"Will you not accept my good wishes for your happiness?" he said. "There is no one more truly wishes you well."

"Oh, thanks!" cried Trix, impatiently. "I always accept all the good wishes I can get; but in this case I think we might make an exchange."

It was his turn to look puzzled. "An exchange? How?" he asked.

"The fact is, I happened to hear exactly the same news of you, Mr. Carlisle," she said, looking straight into my face. "So my congratulations are equally due to you."

He looked exceedingly annoyed, and a red flush rose up in his face.

"Those chattering old maids!" he muttered. "They'll drive me frantic."

"I hope not," said Trix, in a voice of icy disdain, "for the lady's sake. She is a paragon of beauty and sweetness, I believe. Pray accept my best wishes in return for yours."

Thanks!" he muttered, under his mustache.

Then there was a long silence. Forbes came up and took Mr. Carlisle's horse. They had paced up and down the avenue several times, Trix quite forgetful of her determination to go in, and had now stopped short under a wide-spreading beech, each too angry and disdainful, and it may be too sad at heart, to explain matters as they really stood.

"When is it to be?" he asked at last, pushing his stick viciously into the leaf-strewn soil.

"May I ask what concern it can possibly be of yours?" retorted Trix, flaming up.

"None, of course," he returned, now fully roused. "Pray forgive me for manifesting any interest in the affair."

She answered him with bitter words, and the two hot-headed young people had a violent quarrel. She was angry and sarcastic, he was bitter and stern. Neither would give way one jot, both being too proud to confess the mistake each had fallen into, and both being willing to endure all things rather than reveal that they cared in the least about the matter; Trix doubly aggra-

vated by what she chose to consider his insulting want of confidence in her, and he not much less provoked by her scornful assumption of cold indifference. So, when the children once more appeared on the scene, and the disputants had to separate, his wrath was simply at white heat; while Trix, outwardly cool and sarcastic, was in a passion of indignation and anger.

One evening, about three weeks afterward, Miss Rainsford was sitting alone before the fire in the school-room at Ellorage. It was twilight, but the blaze from the fire lighted up the room with a deep red glow, brought odd little gleams and glints of gold on to Trix's wavy brown head, and cast a rosy color on her face, which, as she leaned back in her favorite low seat, looked somewhat weary.

Presently the room door behind her opened, and some one entered. She did not look up till a tall figure came round and stood on the hearth-rug beside her, in the full glow of the fire.

"Mr. Carlisle!" she exclaimed, starting up in amazement, and gazing at him with wide-open eyes.

"Yes, it is I," he said, in a strange, abrupt voice. "Have I startled you? I have been talking to Mrs. Rangeley down-stairs. It was she who told me that you were up here."

Trix kept her eyes fixed on him without uttering a word. She had never seen him since the day of their deadly quarrel, three weeks before; and now that he should voluntarily seek her out implied something strange and incomprehensible.

His next proceeding was still more extraordinary. He knelt down on the hearth-rug at her feet, and, taking her two hands in his, looked into her face with steady, searching eyes.

"So it was not true, Trixie," he said at last, using her old pet name and speaking with a sort of restrained eagerness.

"What was not true?" she asked, in some confusion, and trying to withdraw her hands.

"You are not going to be married to Captain Gresham?"

"Well, what of that?" she said, with some perversity, a little conscious smile curling the corners of her mouth.

He did not answer immediately. Trix glanced at him: his eyes were fixed upon her with an expression she had not seen in

them all these weary months. Hers dropped beneath them.

"Trix, who told you I was going to be married to Laura Felton?" he asked at last, still with the same steady gaze.

"I would rather not tell you," she said. "What is the use of bringing it all up again?"

"I must know," he replied, his mouth looking stern; "for I strongly suspect that some one has been making mischief between us."

"No, they have not. What mischief there is is entirely your own making," she said, with a sort of weary impatience. "No one else is to blame."

"My making!" he exclaimed, incredulously. "Why, Trix, considering that you have scarcely given me a chance of speaking to you all this time, — that you have treated me as the merest casual acquaintance, — how can I be to blame?"

"Do you remember the day at Scout's Scar?" she said, coloring.

"Yes, of course I do. Why?"

"Do you remember how you found me out, and what a long talk we had about the old days? You professed the greatest friendship and sympathy and interest" —

"Not a whit more than I felt," he interposed, *sotto voce*.

"And yet through it all you deceived me," she went on hotly. "I spoke freely and frankly of all that concerned myself, and you repaid it by absolute silence; nay, you even suffered me to be misled; and then you laughed at my delusions, you ridiculed" —

"Stop, Trix! I did nothing of the sort, and you know I did not."

"What is the use of arguing?" she said with impatience. "You cannot deny that you let me believe that you and Mr. Carlisle were two different people. You allowed me to talk of him to you, and you laughed" —

"How could I help it?" he interrupted, deprecatingly. "I was just going to tell you I was Sydney Carlisle, and lived at Scarswood, when you showered down upon me a list of my own enormities; and I could not resist the temptation of hearing myself discussed from an outside point of view. It was so infinitely amusing."

Involuntarily the tears rose in her eyes, and she turned away in pain.

"I did not think you would have drawn

me on in ignorance, and then laughed at me," she said, in a choking voice.

"Nay, Trix, you mistake me,—you do indeed," he urged, trying to get a glimpse of her averted face. "You might have known that I should never ridicule you,—you of all people in the world. Nay, you shall hear me out," laying a detaining hand on her arm, as, in a sudden fit of perversity, she was rising from her chair. "Perhaps, when I found out that you did not know who I was, I ought to have told you at once. Perhaps it was not quite fair to you to leave you in ignorance. I am sorry for it now, and, if it did really vex you, I most heartily beg your pardon."

Trix, perfectly conscious that he was gazing at her most earnestly, sat in silence, her eyes resolutely fixed on one particular piece of coal.

"Trix, do not let us quarrel again," he went on; "but for Mrs. Rangeley I should have gone away today believing you were lost to me. Do not let us make another fatal mistake to gratify a moment's pique, now of all times."

"Since you are supposed to be engaged

yourself, Mr. Carlisle, I am quite at a loss to understand your meaning," she said, proudly. "No words can alter that fact."

A slight smile curved his lips, and he bent forward and took both her hands again into his keeping.

"Trixie, my engagement has no more foundation than yours," he said, gravely: "it existed solely in the imagination of one person,—and, being a lady, she is beyond the reach of reprisals. But, Trixie," his lips relaxing again into a smile, "how much longer do you mean my probation to last? Five years is an unconscionable time to keep me waiting for an answer."

"Five years!" faltered Trix, with shy, downcast eyes. "But Jack told you—it is not—it—it"—

"Jack told me it was ridiculous. Perhaps it was then, though I never took it as your answer. But, Trixie," keeping determined hold of her with one hand, while with the other he turned her face to his keen, steady glance, "is it ridiculous now?"

"No!" whispered Trix, with her head on his shoulder and a deep blush all over her face.

ELIZABETH'S VALENTINE.

BY LOUISE DUPEE.

Elizabeth gave utterance to little homesick sighs as she climbed flight after flight of the dark stairs which led into her lofty little room. She was so deeply absorbed in her own sad thoughts that she did not heed that there was any one behind her, until, all of a sudden, some one stood by her side on the landing, and she looked up into the sensitive face of the young artist who occupied the room opposite. He lifted his hat with the greatest politeness, and seemed to have some desire to linger and say more than good-evening to his pretty neighbor, who was so shy, and looked so lonely; but Elizabeth, though her smile was very sweet, in some way discouraged his efforts to become better acquainted, so he kept silence.

It was a dreary winter's night, cold and dark, with the prospect of a coming storm, and this great city building, crowded with musicians, artists, teachers, dreamers, and homeless beings of all sorts, never seemed more desolate to Elizabeth. Still, Signor Morensi was drawing the blithest carnival strains from his violin, — if a violin can ever be said to give utterance to blithe music. Little Miss Brown, the milliner, who occupied the next room, was laughing merrily with her mother at their early tea, which was made over the gas, in a little black teapot. Young Mr. Smith, the concert singer, was singing "O loving heart, trust on!" in a truly touching manner, at the further end of the hall; and the artist, Mr. Frank Wilson, had left his door open, showing the brightest and cosiest of interiors. A bright fire was shedding its scarlet radiance over pictured walls, and investing everything, even the faded furniture, the worn drapery, and bits of statuary, with something like splendor. Books were strewn about invitingly, and a bouquet of flowers sent its perfume as a greeting to every one who ascended the stairs. Elizabeth's room was not like this, but a bare little place, uncheered by firelight, or anything beautiful except the face of the girl herself. An old piano stood in one corner, weighed down with classical-looking music; a few chairs, a table, and a sofa, which served also as a couch by night, were the

only articles of furniture it contained. The only ornaments, one or two shabby little vases, and the framed photograph of a sad-looking woman, — Elizabeth's mother, who died less than a year ago. Elizabeth taught music. She was all alone in the world, and this little room was what she called home. She took her dinners at a restaurant, and her breakfast and tea she prepared herself when she had the heart to do so. On many occasions she went without either. Fortune frowned upon her. She had only been in the city one year; she had hardly enough pupils to pay her own bills for instruction; and now, after all these months of tireless labor and exertion, of hope and perseverance, the great Signor Bonari, over at the conservatory, had informed her that he feared her voice would never be of any service to her. At first he had given her much encouragement, and she indulged in many bright dreams for the future; but now life seemed likely to be always this same round of thankless drudgery, this poverty and loneliness. Mr. Wilson listened in vain for a sound of her clear, sweet voice this evening, — delightful to listen to, if Signor Bonari had condemned it, though doubtless it was not of sufficient strength to be effective on the stage. He had formed a habit of leaving his door open, for the sake of hearing it more distinctly, and it was when he heard hersing "Robin Adair" and "The Last Rose of Summer," at twilight, before it was time to light the gas and work at those agonizing exercises, and the operatic selections, that he had lost his heart. He had hardly seen her then, — but some persons fall in love with voices, as others fall in love with eyes; and, as he had just been reading Tennyson, he said to himself, "'Please God, this is the one voice for me.'" But, quite unconscious that her singing had already made a conquest, Elizabeth toiled on, thinking nothing more of her neighbor than that he had the pleasantest smile in the world, and that it was no wonder that he was growing famous as an artist, his pictures were so wonderful. She had an eye for color, and his coloring, even the critics allowed, was almost equal

to that of the old masters. And sometimes she wondered why he remained in that dreary building, instead of seeking something like a home. Probably he was attached to the room, however, he had been there so long.

It was quite dark by this time, but Elizabeth, without removing her things or striking a light, threw herself on to the sofa, and burst into a flood of tears. Never had the world seemed so dark to her, never had she felt so utterly alone. For an hour or so she remained in this position, sobbing as if her heart would break, when suddenly there came a tap at the door; and, thinking it was either the janitor to inquire something about the steam, or Miss Brown to borrow something, — Miss Brown was always borrowing, — or the boy who did errands in the building, who was always making some excuse to come to her room, Elizabeth rose and opened the door. It was the boy, and he brought her a note, saying that Mr. Wilson would like a reply.

"What in the world can Mr. Wilson be writing to me for?" she thought, hurrying to obtain a light, that she might solve the mystery. It was this: —

It had suddenly struck the young gentleman, as it was a very dreary night, and all his neighbors were likely to be at home, that a little social meeting would be highly agreeable; and, as he had just finished a new picture, he had invited a few of them to come into his room and criticise it, and spend a little time in social intercourse. Would she be so very kind as to favor him with her company?

Elizabeth looked very blank indeed as she finished reading the note, and a realizing sense of the condition of her face stole into her mind. She possessed one of those unfortunate countenances which cannot bear tears, and, unlike those of childhood, they did not dry like the summer dew, and leave no trace behind on her innocent cheeks. A weeping maiden is supposed to be very interesting; but a maiden who has wept is generally quite the reverse, — at least as far as looks are concerned. Elizabeth had no need to look in the mirror to make herself aware that it was impossible for her to appear in society that evening. Her eyes were fearfully red and swollen. Her nose was twice its natural size, and artistically spotted with bright scarlet. Even her lips were swollen, and her brow covered

with red marks. To be sure this highly unpleasant state of affairs would grow beautifully less in time, but not in any great degree until the small hours of the night; and so all she could do was to send her regrets, and feel very sorry over them. It would have been such a pleasure, such a relief, to spend one evening away from that gloomy room, and in pleasant society; and certainly Mr. Wilson was pleasant, if the others were not so very agreeable. It was foolish to weep: it did not pay at all, and she would never do so any more.

The next morning Mr. Wilson's door was closed, but Miss Brown came in to have a little chat.

"We had such a lovely time in Mr. Wilson's room last night!" she said. "He's a splendid man; and I've no doubt but that he would have invited you if he had been more acquainted with you. We looked at his picture, which is beautiful of course, as all his pictures are; then we had a little collation, perfectly charming, it was so daintily served. After that Mr. Harris read aloud, and we talked and laughed in the most informal manner, — got nicely acquainted, all of us, and here we've been in the building together, some of us, over seven years, and hardly bowed to each other before. Mr. Wilson was devoted to Tilly Clapp all the evening. Well, Tilly is pretty; but I should think he'd look higher for a wife. He took her to a concert the other evening, they say."

"Indeed," said Elizabeth; and, for some reason or other, she was strangely disturbed that he should have been so attentive to Miss Clapp, and she commenced to think about Mr. Wilson a good deal more than she cared to. "What was he to her?" she thought. To be sure, his smile was always very bright when they met, as if he were pleased to see her; and he had sometimes gone out of his way to do her some trifling service, though they had exchanged very few words. Probably he pitied her lonely condition, he seemed such a kind-hearted man.

The next time they met he regarded her rather reproachfully, and bowed in a rather more distant manner than usual; and Elizabeth, though she had always felt a strange shyness in his presence, she could hardly tell why, looked straight into his eyes, which were unconsciously full of pleading, and made what he considered, at least, to

be the prettiest apology imaginable. After that they were continually happening to meet in the street, and Mr. Wilson would accompany her home. Then one night he asked her to go to a concert with him, and Elizabeth accepted the invitation, looking more like a princess than a half-starved music-teacher, in her old black silk dress, with trimmings of some rare old lace which had belonged to her mother. Elizabeth knew how to wear old lace, and attracted so much attention by her beauty and her style that her escort was decidedly proud of her. Life was growing a good deal brighter to Elizabeth, in spite of her failure in singing.

The days wore on, and St. Valentine's Day came, — a bright, sparkling day, all snow and sunshine and blue skies. In the morning Elizabeth sang an old madrigal, dainty and delicate as dropping dew, — love in springtime quaintly but so happily expressed, — not because it was St. Valentine's Day, she had forgotten that, but because she was in the mood. And Mr. Wilson, who had opened his door to listen, when it was finished brought a little bouquet of violets to her as thanks. Then she went on her dreary round of lesson-giving with a light heart, not reaching her room until dusk. When she had lighted the gas, and removed her things, her eye chanced to fall on a letter which the postman had slipped under the door, and, on opening it, it proved to be a valentine.

Elizabeth was fairly overcome with surprise and bewilderment. It was a very gay affair, covered with huge swollen roses and corpuient bees; and the scroll containing the written matter was gingerly held between the thumbs and fingers of two immense Cupids, whose outspread wings covered nearly the whole page.

"Sweetest Lizzie, — Will you wait for me, and be my wife?

"Your true Valentine,
"F. WILSON."

Only this and nothing more did the scroll contain, but Elizabeth thought it was quite enough, and sat down rubbing her forehead, to be sure that she wasn't insane. Could Mr. Wilson, with his refined taste, have sent her such a thing as this? And, if he did so, was it not only in fun? — coarse, cruel, ungentlemanly fun it would be, to be sure; but could he have sent it in earnest? She decided at last that it must be in ear-

nest, though it seemed so very unlike him. He was so fastidious, so reserved in his almost lover-like attentions. His taste was perfect too; and, oh those dreadful pink Cupids! those yellow and green and brick-red roses! and the "Sweetest Lizzie"! She did so dislike to be called Lizzie. And what *did* he mean by waiting?

Elizabeth had only been out of a convent school for one year, and she knew little of city ways. Those valentines might be fashionable, for all she knew: such vulgar absurdities did become popular sometimes even among the higher classes. But then how did he dare to call her sweetest Lizzie? And what an unformed school-boy hand he wrote in! The other note he had written her was something of a scrawl, she remembered: this was stiff and labored. Should she reply to it at all? And what should she say if she did so? She would dream over it, and then perhaps she would be less bewildered. In the morning they met on the stairs, and he came towards her with the same cordial, unhesitating air as ever; but Elizabeth dared not look up at him, and bowed as coldly as possible. And, when he would have detained her, she pleaded haste, and ran away as fast as ever she could. All that day she avoided him, and the next also, though he seemed more than usually anxious to see her, and looked very reproachful and sad when she pretended not to see the hand which he held out to her in greeting. Elizabeth cried all night, — then she wrote him this letter: —

"Dear Mr. Wilson, — I received your note of the fourteenth; and, though I am deeply sensible of the honor conferred upon me when you ask me to become your wife, I cannot accept the position.

"Yours very truly,

"ELIZABETH ACTON."

Then she wept more inconsolably than ever. And, when she saw him coming up the street, out of her little attic window, she wished, oh! she wished with all her heart that she had n't sent that letter, in spite of the pink Cupids, and the "Sweetest Lizzie," and everything.

Two or three more days passed, and she hardly saw him at all. He always kept his door closed now. And once or twice when she met him in the hall he seemed to regard her with a look which expressed as much of wonder as anything else; but then she only

glanced at him, and she could hardly tell how he looked.

Sunday came, and she went to church, trying to forget her troubles in her devotions. It was a balmy, spring-like day. The sky was blue as summer. Sparrows were chattering in the tree-boughs, and the breeze was cheering, as if it brought news of May. She crossed the Common on her way home, and was walking very slowly, when she heard footsteps close behind her, and Mr. Wilson suddenly appeared at her side, begging to be allowed to walk with her a little way. She bowed her permission rather stiffly, and walked along with downcast eyes. He was silent for a few moments, then, after a while, he began,—

"Miss Acton, I cannot accept your refusal. There is some strange mistake about it,—some cruel mystery. I am going to ask you to marry me myself now. Before, some one must have asked you for me. I cannot possibly understand it, but I did not write to you."

Elizabeth's face flushed crimson, and then grew deadly pale. What a fool she had made of herself!

"You did not send me that valentine?" she said. "How very strange! Your name was signed to it. I cannot imagine what it all means."

"My whole name, or only my initials?" he inquired. "But never mind that now. I cannot wait until you tell me whether you will not consent to be my wife."

Elizabeth was silent, but her appearance was not discouraging, and before they reached home he had won a faint and tremulous, but highly favorable, answer from the lady of his love.

"Do let me see that remarkable valentine," he said to her that night, when they were wondering over the mystery.

She produced it, displaying the lovely Cupids with a merry laugh.

"How could you have believed for one moment, Elizabeth, that I could send you a thing like this?"

Elizabeth colored deeply. "What else could I think, with your name written there in plain black and white? I know no other F. Wilson. And who would dare to use your name in such a way? Then what could the motive be?"

"Stay, Elizabeth!" he exclaimed, breaking into a sudden fit of laughter. "A new light has dawned upon me. Why did n't I think of it before? Why, the errand-boy's name is F. Wilson too; and his devotion to you has long been a standing joke in the building. The mystery is solved."

"Is it possible?" said Elizabeth. "I never knew his last name. I always called him Fred. I have noticed that there was something on his mind for a day or two; and he has regarded me in the most sheepish manner."

"Poor fellow! I suppose he is in a dreadful condition. But—cheer up, Elizabeth!—his age is only fourteen; and he is likely to recover from his passion in time. Hereafter I shall pay him an extra fee for every errand he goes for me. He's a valuable youth though. I have been strangely blind to his worth until now. If his absurd valentine had n't made you cruel, and me desperate, I don't know when I should have found courage to speak my mind, dearest, you were so shy and reserved."

FLORETTE.

BY ADA STRICKLAND.

It was a battered and disreputable looking old cage, and the bird within it was no dainty golden plumed songster swinging gayly in his gilded ring, and bursting into merry song with the slightest provocation. No! He was as battered and forlorn as his cage, and both were strangely out of keeping with the other dainty belongings of the room. So I was not at all surprised to see our proud little Ethel's nose curl up at the corners as she edged away from it.

"What can make Auntie Nell keep such a looking thing as this in her room, Belle Branscom," she said, "when there are such beautiful, beautiful birds in the city, and cages just like little parlors? It's an awful old thing."

"It's not an awful old thing at all, Ethel Arden," said my small niece Belle, indignantly, "and you are a very unpolite girl to say so. There! He's the dearest bird in the world, and I'd rather have him than all your 'beautiful, beautiful birds.'"

"He can't sing a note," said Ethel, briefly.

"I don't care if he can't. He *hollers* real pretty sometimes when he's a mind to."

Just then Ethel's mamma called her to come down-stairs, and the bird was soon forgotten by both children. But I left my sewing and came and stood for a long time by that time-worn cage. Ethel would have been still more surprised if she had seen the tears that fell on the rough plumage of the gray old bird. That evening when the children gathered round me, begging for a story, I told them the true history of the bird Florette, choosing words to suit the romance-loving Ethel.

Afar off in a beautiful Southern State, among its tropical flowers, lived a happy family of four brothers and sisters. Despising the lowly abodes of men, the parents had built them a home among the branches of a stately tree, and here nestling among the soft green leaves they sang and danced through the long bright days, and when the evening shadows fell, sweet and clear arose their hymn of praise to Him who had made their lives so joyous. Knowing little and caring less for the great busy world that

lay beyond their native forest, so full of wicked men and unholy schemes, they had lived this pleasant life almost a year before a great calamity befell them. One day when the mother was giving them their daily lesson in vocal music, and each little heart was swelling with song, there came a murmur of voices beneath the tree. Bidding them be silent the mother listened anxiously, peering cautiously through the leaves to see what the intruders were like. Live giants they looked to her as they threw themselves down on the greensward, but they were really only two school-boys on a hunting tour. Listen! the poor little mother can hear her own heart beat as one exclaims, "Now, Will, I must have a bird! I'm not going home without one. I thought, from what you wrote, I had only to reach for a mocking bird down here in Florida, and there I had him."

"Plenty of them," said the other. "Only we don't happen to find them."

Just at this crisis a neighboring jay-bird set up such a song as no mortal mocking-bird could withstand, and before the mother could interpose, the youngest of her nestlings sent up an answering song, mimicking the harsh tones of his neighbor, and so far surpassing him that in that instant he sealed his own fate. In a twinkling gun and coat were thrown aside and Eddie was ascending the tree. The frightened mother flew off, calling loudly for her mate, and careering wildly about the tree, but all in vain.

"There! there!" said the boy, taking the singer in his hand and smoothing the ruffled plumage. "I only want one of your babies, Mrs. Mocker," and he left the mother to console herself with the thought that if one of them must be taken, it was best it should be the one who had brought this terrible fright upon them. The captured bird was taken home and solemnly christened Florette. Soon he was taken from that State to a more western one, where he became the joy and pride of his young master's heart. Such a talented bird was never before known. He was full of cunning tricks, but his favorite one seemed to be that of

kissing. He would do anything for a kiss from his master, from standing on his head in his bath dish, to whistling "Daisy Dean," without a false note. Thus four years passed by, and the boy became a man, but his bird was dear to his heart as ever. When the war came upon us, he with the other boys of his native town joined the grand army of the nation, and went to fight for her honor. But what to do with Florette. He could not bear to part with him, and besides he had no mother or sister who would love him for his master's sake. So when Company A went into winter quarters, in the tent of the young captain swung Florette's cage, and in it Florette discoursed sweet music to an appreciating audience. When marching orders came the cage was placed in an ambulance; and thus the bird followed his master through the war, with Sherman in his march to the sea—into the hospital, comforting the sick and wounded with his sweet notes of hope and cheer. At last the war was over, and Florette and his master came home. And it was not long

until Edward gave the bird a mistress who had known and loved him all his life, and the three went together to a new home in a distant foreign land. Hardly a year had passed in the new home before the dreadful scourge yellow fever laid its blighting hand upon Florette's master, and they buried him there so far from home. The widow was left to return to that saddened home with no token of all the joy that went out with her, but the battered old cage and the silent bird. He is with her still, Ethel. Too old and too sorrowful to sing, he can only evince his joy at the sight of his dead master's friend by a feeble fluttering of his wings and one sweet but solitary note. Do you wonder now, Ethel, that Auntie Nell keeps the old cage and the ugly bird in her room?

Ethel could make me no answer, but there were tears in her blue eyes, and when next she passed the cage she stroked the bird tenderly and whispered softly to herself,

"It was Uncle Edward's bird."

FORTUNE-TELLING.

BY KATE PUTNAM.

"You actually believe in ghosts! Let me look at you. I never heard of such a thing before." And Lou Barrington scanned Allie Duncan with the air of one who indeed had found a curiosity.

"Yes," answered Allie, in a somewhat fearful voice, at the same time looking apprehensively around, as if she stood in momentary awe of seeing the cheerful sunshine burn brimstone blue, and a sheeted spectre arise from the shade of every rustic pillar that supported the piazza. "Yes, I do believe in ghosts."

Three gentlemen smoking on the further end of the veranda threw away their cigars, and joined the young ladies, having overheard the loud exclamation of Lou Barrington, and feeling a decided interest in the subject under consideration.

All three were young men; Walden Bourne, a handsome fellow, with big black eyes, and hair, and mustache—and, some whispered, temper to correspond; but, nevertheless, good-hearted, and a general favorite; Ford Grafton, his antipodes in all save personal beauty, blue-eyed and fair-haired, with face and head of that type which brings out the commonplace in others, as might be seen by contrasting him with Harry Marsh, the last, and—shall I say it?—least of the trio, a young man distinguished for champagne suppers, fast horses, unlimited card-playing, and some deficiency of brains, yet withal moving in good society, and eminently a person to know.

As they approached Allie cast a reproachful glance at Lou, whose demure innocence was really edifying.

"You have come just in time," she said, addressing no one in particular, and the three gentlemen in general; "you have come just in time to hear Allie repeat a thrilling ghost story, for she declares she believes in them, and of course has some foundation, probably in a personal experience. When was it, where was it, how was it, Alie?"

That young lady blushed and pouted to have so many eyes simultaneously directed at her; then, the ghastly terror returning,

again she glanced nervously about, for her curly head was filled to overflowing with superstition.

"Ten to one, Miss Lou," said Harry Marsh, who could not well speak without drawing his illustrations from the turf or the gaming-table, "ten to one, *you're* not afraid of anything, spiritual or substantial, as my philosophy used to have it."

"Of course not," laughed Lou; "and why in the name of common sense *should* any one be? And only to think of this foolish little creature, who no doubt dreads her own shadow, or to be alone in the dark!"

"Her shadow! why, 'twouldn't be large enough to be perceptible. I'd as soon think of mentioning a humming-bird's shadow!" said Walden Bourne, looking down at Allie Duncan, who, by dint of standing on tiptoe, might perhaps come within half a foot of his shoulder; and whom, partly in consequence of her diminutive size, partly because she was such a pretty simple little thing, every one treated like a child. Nevertheless, she held in her childish keeping more hearts than she could well reckon, and among them those of Walden Bourne and Ford Grafton; which perhaps explained their following her like puppets pulled by a string, as teasing Lou Barrington declared.

"Now, Allie," exclaimed Lou, impatiently, "aren't you ashamed to keep us waiting! Come, little Queen Mab, was it a gigantic grasshopper or a furious bumble-bee which threatened your majesty?"

"Yes, Miss Allie, what was it? wont you tell me?" said Walden Bourne, persuasively, with a slight emphasis on the pronoun, sufficient, however, to make Ford Grafton cast upon him as black a look as his blue eyes were capable of bestowing.

"Why yes," said Allie, softening suddenly; "I'd tell you if there was anything to tell, but it was only this: Lou and I were talking, and she told me I looked as pale as if I had seen a ghost; and I said, O, please do not speak so, and she asked me if I believed in them, and I said yes, and then you came, and she's been teasing me ever since—"

"And, and, and!" interrupted Lou Barrington; "what a pitiable case! And one more 'and'—you're the most superstitious little goose in creation."

"If you call me names I'll go into the house," said Allie, indignantly.

"There, there! so I would! only something might happen to it. Something always does to little folks that go off in a pet."

"Something always does to such adepts in teasing as you, Miss Barrington," said Bourne, with a laugh; then turning to Allie, "Don't mind her; she's only trying to frighten you, but I won't allow her. There are no such things as ghosts. Won't you believe me?"

Again the slight emphasis, and again a black look from Ford Grafton, who held himself apart from so absurd a conversation.

"You're my very best friend, I know," exclaimed Allie, impulsively; "and I'd believe you sooner than any one else;" whereupon Mr. Bourne looked protectingly down at her, and darted a queer little look at Grafton from his black eyes.

"But then," added Allie, after a little hesitation, "though to be sure I never saw one, there are so many stories of their appearance, which must be true, that I *may* see one at any time," concluding with a shudder, that brought Bourne a trifle nearer. He felt half tempted to frighten her, but, seeing that these foolish fears were no laughing matter to her, he not only refrained from any aggravation, but very considerably attempted to dispel them. In this laudable endeavor Harry Marsh joined, Lou Barrington laughing heartily, meanwhile, and Ford Grafton sulkily silent, affecting great interest in a carriage passing on the high-road, some rods distant.

But all argument failed to convince Allie Duncan that her *bete noir* was imaginary. From childhood, when her nurse had filled her ears with tales of supernatural events, she had been the most superstitious little creature living. Everything had its significance, its omen. Not a dog could bark, nor a bird peck on the window, nor that harmless little insect, the death-watch, sound its tick-tick in the walls, but it straightway sent little Miss Allie into a preternatural solemnity.

Ford Grafton, tiring of the monotonous occupation of gazing after a carriage, and

stroking the head of his little terrier, here joined in the conversation.

"There," said Lou, who ordinarily disliked him, but greatly respected his reasoning powers, "the Oracle is going to speak. I hope he may convince you, Allie, for I have lost all patience with you."

"Miss Barrington," said Grafton, gravely, "I am sorry to say that I could not convince her, as my argument would only strengthen her belief."

Chorus of astonished voices: "What! you believe in ghosts!" and an amazed "By Jove!" from Harry Marsh.

"I certainly believe in the supernatural," replied Ford Grafton, with undisturbed composure, despite the dawning frown on the forehead of Walden Bourne. "In every age we have, I think, sufficient evidence that not only are such things possible, but that they have actually occurred. Don't understand me to say that they are frequent, or that I credit one thousandth part of the rubbish that has been said or written about them, but simply that superstition is as natural an instinct as love or hate, and as well-founded."

Lou Barrington's eyes were like saucers; Allie Duncan was trembling, Bourne angry, and Harry Marsh "deuced bored," as he would have phrased it, for the existence or non-existence of the supernatural element was to him a matter of supreme indifference.

"This element," continued Grafton, who had a profound disbelief of what he was saying, but certain reasons, nevertheless, for his argument, "has existed in every age. No nation has been free from it. The witchcraft of the colonial day had as solid a foundation of truth as the spiritualism of the present."

"Just about!" interposed Walden Bourne, but Grafton went on, unmoved.

"Where once there were magicians, we now have mediums and fortune-tellers; most of whom are, of course, charlatans, but I hardly see how a rational mind can entertain a doubt that a small proportion really have the insight which they claim. Now, for instance," he continued, looking at Allie, on whom no word was lost, but who sat with her eyes riveted in an awful fascination upon his face, "there is, in this very place an old woman whom the villagers style 'Marm Woodbury,' who professes fortune-telling, and who is said actually to

be able to foretell the future, having predicted many events which have afterwards transpired."

Looking up, the speaker experienced no small annoyance to see that Allie, with very pale cheeks, had drawn up nearer to Walden Bourne, who, with his tall figure and broad shoulders, certainly looked as if, could strength avail, he might protect one from any danger, supernatural or otherwise.

"Have you ever seen this sibyl?" asked Lou, incredulously, of Mr. Grafton.

"Yes, I saw her yesterday, washing clothes in one of the most picturesque places I was ever in. The contrast annoyed me so, that I inquired whose house—so called *par courtesie*, as it is only a hovel—it was by Elton Brook, and was informed that 'Marm Woodbury' lived there. Asking further, I was told that she 'knew a sight, and could tell fortunes.' So, Miss Lou, if you wish for a sibylline leaf, we will go there this afternoon. I suppose that Miss Allie would hardly dare to venture, however."

Now, of all things, Allie longed yet feared to have her fortune told, as Ford Grafton very well knew, for she had been fairly in a quiver ever since the subject was mentioned.

So it was arranged that Mr. Grafton should accompany Miss Barrington and her friend Miss Duncan to the house by Elton Brook, on that very afternoon, the time having been carefully chosen by Ford, who happened to be aware that a previous engagement would prevent Walden Bourne from forming one of the party.

"Wont it be fun enough, Allie?" exclaimed the former; "but come, it's time to dress for dinner."

And the ladies left the piazza; whereupon Walden Bourne found the company uncongenial, and departed also.

"Confound it, Grafton!" said Harry Marsh, "you were a fool to trump your own trick. Bourne stands twenty pegs higher than you in little Duncan's estimation, all through your frightening her, take my word for it."

"Your wisdom is as infallible as your vocabulary is select." And Ford Grafton turned on his heel with a contemptuous smile, as he could well afford to do, possessing twenty times the cleverness of Harry Marsh.

The latter gentleman, left alone, gazed after his companion with a "whew," and took out another cigar. His solitary smoke was enlivened with meditations oddly mingled, concerning the disposition to shy manifested by his tandem leader, the points in his last game of euchre, and the twinkling feet and altogether bewildering "style" of Lou Barrington. In which profitable reverie we will leave him.

The afternoon found the trio at "Marm Woodbury's" miserable hovel, undeserving the name of "house," with which it was dignified by her neighbors. Ford Grafton was cool and self-possessed, as usual, Allie all a-tremble with blended fear and excitement, while Lou, animated by the spirit of frolic, was on the *qui vive* for the fun of the adventure. That fun, however, so far as concerned herself, proved rather small; for, before uttering a single prediction, the grim seeress required a solemn vow that her oracle should be implicitly obeyed, a vow which sensible Lou had no notion of taking. So, the fortune-teller and her visitor being equally obstinate, the latter was forced to content herself with the prospect of listening to the recital of Allie's destiny. Here again, however, she was doomed to disappointment; for, although that little lady did not hesitate to vow the performance of something to which she felt certain the fates would compel her, the sibyl, mysterious beyond most of her weird sisterhood, would not repeat the fortune aloud, according to the common fashion, but, after closely scanning Allie's pretty palm with many unintelligible mutterings, very secretly wrote something upon a slip of paper which none were allowed to see. Enclosing the paper in a sealed envelop, she gave it to Allie, with instructions to read it exactly one year from that day, until which time no mortal eye, not even her own, must rest upon it. Then, reminding the half-frightened child of the vow of obedience, she dismissed her visitors.

"Well, Mr. Bourne, would you like to know the result of our call on Mr. Grafton's famous sibyl!" exclaimed Lou Barrington, who, ever since their return, had been grumbling over her disappointment.

"Of all things," replied that gentleman, who did, indeed, look genuinely interested. "I was meditating the propriety of asking some particulars, but was afraid of frightening Miss Allie, she looks so pale."

"I'm sure I don't know what she has to look pale about," rejoined Lou, impatiently, "unless 'twas the sight of such a vision of dirt and ugliness as one can't expect to see twice in a lifetime! As for anything more, why, 'twas a complete imposition."

"You forget, Miss Barrington," interposed Ford Grafton from behind the pillar where he was lounging, watching the deepening shadows, "that you cannot claim anything at her hands, as you would not agree to follow her directions."

"Who, that had seen her, would!" exclaimed the young lady, contemptuously. "Surrender my will to such a creature as that? No indeed, Mr. Grafton, not I!"

"O, Miss Lou, I have not the slightest intention of defending the woman's personal appearance. Granted that she would not shine in polite society, but, after all, what does that prove? I believe it is not upon record that those most distinguished for supernatural gifts have been conspicuous for either beauty or elegance."

"O, that's all very well for argument," said Lou, who had listened impatiently to his specious words; "but do you mean to say, Mr. Grafton, that you yourself actually believe it in the power of that low ignorant creature to foretell Allie's future, as she pretended to do?"

Out of his shadow Grafton cast a glance at Allie Duncan, whose face, revealed by the moonlight, was strained and eager, while her eyes were opened wide in anticipation. Biting a smile into the corner of his mustache, he answered, gravely:

"As you know, Miss Lou, I had no better opportunity than yourself for judging of the probability of this special prediction, but that the prophecy, whatever it may be, contained in that paper will be fulfilled, I do most sincerely believe. But why appeal to a third person? Ask Miss Allie what she herself thinks."

Whereat, Allie, being set upon vigorously, was heard at length in a very tremulous tone to declare her faith that the prediction embodied in the mysterious paper would every word come true. Upon which Lou lost all patience, and accepting Harry Marsh's oft-urged invitation, went off for a moonlight drive, in the course of which she was to tell his fortune. Presently Ford Grafton, feeling, perhaps, tolerably sure of his game, did not care to follow it up too closely; rose and sauntered into the house,

saying, with a supercilious smile, as he passed Walden Bourne:

"I will leave you to try your arguments with Miss Duncan, Bourne. I trust you may be successful."

The tone, and the slight emphasis upon certain words, left no doubt of the double meaning of this innuendo. Bourne looked after him with an expression seeming to indicate that the arguments he would incline to try with *him* were more forcible than pleasant. Then he turned to Allie.

"Now, Miss Allie, you are going to tell me your fortune, aren't you?"

"O, I don't know it myself," she replied.

"What, do you really mean that you haven't looked at that paper yet?"

"Of course not," with simple astonishment.

"Then we'll read it together. Perhaps there's something about me in it, you know, Miss Allie."

But, unheeding this hint, Allie shrank back, alarmed by the thought of disobeying the fortune-teller's directions.

"What, won't you trust me?" said Bourne, reproachfully.

But Allie, very pale, begged him not to urge her to what she dared not do.

"At least let me see the outside."

And, with many injunctions, she drew from her pocket the treasure, which she placed in his hand. Of course his solicitations began again, and, with the paper in his grasp, he commenced a serious expostulation upon the folly and danger of a belief in such absurdities. But, pettishly snatching it from him, she restored it to her pocket, and ran up stairs, without bidding him good-night.

Walden Bourne sat a few moments where she had left him, engaged in some deep meditation, then, rising, turned to enter the house. He had not taken two steps, however, when something gleaming white in the moonlight arrested his attention. Stooping, he picked up what proved to be the identical paper containing Allie Duncan's fortune, which she had snatched from him three minutes before, and which, missing her pocket, had evidently fallen unperceived to the ground.

The young man sat down again, to consider this new development. His wish to read the paper had arisen from far more than mere curiosity. Something in Ford Grafton's look, tone and manner had al-

ready excited his suspicion, and, knowing how easily Allie's superstitious fears could be played upon, he fancied that there might have been foul play in connection with this fortune-telling expedition, conducted with secrecy and caution so unusual. In his hand he held the key to solve this mystery, and, after due deliberation, he did not find it inconsistent with his honor, scrupulous as it was, to cast aside the means of saving this simple child from the toils of an adversary so unequally matched as wily Ford Grafton. So, without further ado, he opened the envelop, the seal yielding readily, and, with darkening brow, read, by the aid of the clear moonlight, the following lines, written in a hand which, though feigned, he recognized as Ford Grafton's:

"ALICE UNDERWOOD DUNCAN,—You have dared to seek the dread knowledge of your destiny, and sworn to abide by the revelation of the spirits through their medium. Know, then, that your marriage will take place in fifteen months from this date, on the 10th of September, 1804. Within a week after you read this, your lover will ask you to be his wife, down by the river, under the great maple. You must answer yes, and marry him on the day appointed. He is a tall gentleman, with blue eyes and fair complexion, and his name is Ford Grafton. He loves you dearly, and will make you happy. If you abide by your vow, the blessings of the spirits will rest upon you. If not—beware!"

The face of Walden Bourne, as he read this precious epistle, was a study, expressing the conflicting emotions of anger at Grafton, love for Allie, and amusement at the whole affair.

"This is the nineteenth century, and such absurdities exist!" he thought; then, reflecting that there was no time to be lost in musing, he considered a moment as to what course would be best to pursue under the circumstances.

If he handed it back to Allie, the foolish child, whatever might be her inclination, would not dare to act otherwise than in accordance with the commands ordained therein. If he did not restore it, she would miss it, and the result would be simply another visit to that "confounded old hag," as Bourne vengefully termed "Marm Woodbury," and the lost paper would be replaced by one precisely similar, as Ford

Grafton would be sure to know of whatever transpired.

Now Walden Bourne had a reasonably definite idea, if Allie Duncan had not, what one of all her lovers stood first in her affections, and had been tolerably secure as to the final disposition of the prize equally coveted by himself and Grafton. So, after another moment of deliberation, his course was decided—namely: to leave the fortune unaltered, with the exception of the passage containing the name and description of her lover. This he changed, to read as follows:

"A tall gentleman, with *black eyes and dark complexion*, and his name is *Walden Bourne*."

This being done, he tore a leaf from his notebook, hastily copied the original, in an effectually-disguised hand, and, having torn the first paper in shreds, placed the second carefully in the envelop, and sealed it as quickly as might be, for he now heard Allie Duncan's step upon the stair.

Down she came, all in a flutter; she had just missed the cherished paper, and, forgetful of everything else, hastened to seek it, with her hair, a most disordered halo of golden curls, reaching nearly to her waist, for the discovery of her loss had interrupted the process of brushing it out. Pretty enough she looked, with the tangled ringlets flying, and her little bare feet thrust hastily into her slippers. Seeing Walden Bourne, her first impulse was to give a little scream, as she recollected the disorder of her dress, and her stockingless feet. He bit his mustache, to restrain the smile that rose to his lip, but hastened to reassure her, thinking, meanwhile, that he had never seen anything so pretty as this little frightened fairy.

"Did you miss your paper, Miss Allie? I found it a moment ago, among the bushes, and have kept it for you."

"O, thank you—thank you a thousand times, Mr. Bourne! I could not have slept, if I had not found it; and you were so honorable not to open it!"

Bourne colored a little as he replied:

"I am glad to restore it, as I am not sure I could long resist the temptation to read it. I would advise you to keep it safely under lock and key for the future."

"I will, indeed," she answered, as she placed it in her pocket. "And now good-night."

"Good-night, little one. I hope you have

not taken cold, standing here. Meantime preserve the precious fortune. In a year I may know."

The expression in his eyes was peculiar, and, blushing, she snatched her hand away, and hastened to her room, undergoing, on its very threshold, a mock-severe lecture from Lou Barrington, just returned, for conversing with Mr. Bourne in such a costume.

After that things went on much the same. Other visitors were added, but driving, dancing and flirting formed the principal amusements still, and the season wore away without affecting any of our party particularly. Harry Marsh went home to New York; Lou Barrington was to visit some Southern relatives; Ford Grafton, secure in his remembrance of Allie's fortune, which he regarded as a masterpiece of strategy, spent the winter in Cuba, not grudging Walden Bourne his proximity to "little Duncan," whose residence was in Baltimore, which city Bourne discovered to possess more attractions than all the world beside.

One thing was arranged, however—that, far as they were sundered now, the next summer should find them again in Weston, a meeting to which all looked forward with varied anticipations, but equal pleasure.

Passing over the intervening time, with which we have nothing to do, we find ourselves again in Weston. Down by the river, under the great maple, a promise has just been spoken, and the betrothal ring slipped upon a little frightened finger. For last night Allie Duncan read her fortune, and kissed the paper that contained his name; and to-night, in a happy flutter, she came down the river-path to meet her fate.

"Now don't you believe in fortune-telling, Walden?" she asks, triumphantly, as she shows him the paper.

And, as his eyes rest upon it a second time, he answers, holding her closer yet:

"Yes, darling; and I *will* make you happy—so help me Heaven!"

All the party had arrived, with the single exception of Ford Grafton, who made his appearance a day or two later. With a pleasant smile at Bourne, he requested Allie Duncan to walk down towards the river with him. His rival considerably relinquished Miss Allie, and the two went off together.

The result of that interview was never known. When they returned, Ford Grafton's face revealed nothing, but Walden Bourne said, mercilessly:

"Grafton, I am quite of your opinion as regards fortune-telling. I believe there *are* those to whom it is permitted to know the future."

Grafton evaded the subject, and, for some reason, shortly left Weston, to take up his permanent abode in Cuba; but Walden Bourne and Allie—now his wife—visit Weston every summer.

Lou Barrington declares that Allie has become sensible, and Harry Marsh seconds his *fiancee's* assertion with a—"Deuced pretty, but what a little fool she used to be about ghosts, and all that sort of thing!"

Now the truth is, that shortly after marriage, Bourne made a complete confession to his little wife, which, in view of her love for "dear Walden," she easily forgave, shuddering to think of what a destiny she had narrowly escaped. So, by degrees, she gave over her foolish superstition, particularly as "Marm Woodbury," who had become tired of the role of fortune-telling, assured her that, "as far as she knewed, there warnt nothing in the whole thing, from beginning to end."

And so ended Allie's fortune.

FROST-WORK.

BY ANNA MORRIS.

CHAPTER I.

THE FROST KING'S PROPHECY.

Weary of out-door sports, it was a merry party that had assembled in Miss Chalmers's cosy library—her niece and nephew, Rose and Harry Chalmers, who were spending their winter holidays with their aunt, and the sons of two of her neighbors, Archie Henderson and Charlie Mannering, with whom they had been on a skating frolic all the morning, but the biting cold and bleak wind had driven them unwillingly into the house.

"Nothing to do," sighed Rose, with a doleful expression of countenance, after every conceivable game had been proposed, some tried and others rejected. "Nothing to do, and a whole hour yet before dinner. Don't go, boys! Auntie, do tell us something new and amusing to pass away the time."

"How will the Frost King's Prophecy

do?" asked Miss Chalmers, as in looking up from her work at Rose's appeal, her glance rested on the quaint old latticed window, now covered with delicate frost tracery.

"It sounds promising," answered Rose with awakening animation. "What is it?" and her companions also looked interested.

"I have tried it many a time on these very windows," said Miss Chalmers, glancing around the room with an air of affectionate pride, for this was the old Chalmers homestead, in which she had passed all her life, and everything, from the time-honored mansion itself, to the high boundary wall which separated the estate from its neighbors, was sacred in her eyes.

"We always chose these windows," she continued, presently, "because there are more panes in a row, and we liked to make the prophecy as long as possible. You must choose a row of panes, and beginning at the left hand read across to the right hand, and—

ing in the frost-pictures all that may portray your future life."

"I see!" cried Harry, starting up and approaching the broad western window. "Come on, boys, and let's try it."

But the other lads politely turned to his sister. "After the *Lady Rose*," said Archie with the quiet gravity that always made that small maiden wonder whether he secretly thought her very young and babyish; notwithstanding which, she really liked him better than the gay Charlie, who was now bowing with mock solemnity, and entreating the honor of leading her to the window to try her fate.

With a coquettish shake of her long sunny curls, she accepted his proffered arm, and in another moment the four were earnestly debating which row of panes seemed best adapted for their purpose.

"I shall choose the upper ones," said Rose, at length. "I like to be highest, and besides, in this left-hand corner, there is the figure of a girl. See! Well, that is me, as I stand now, just starting to seek my fortune."

"The *Lady Rose* in search of adventures!" announced Charlie; "and close beside her stands her faithful knight, ready to follow her to the world's end. Behold him!" and Charlie, pointing to the second figure on the pane, at the same moment threw himself into a most heroic attitude at Rose's side.

"No you don't, old fellow!" exclaimed Harry. "That's just like you! How do you know but Archie or I intend to be Rose's knight?"

"You're counted out, being her brother," began Charlie.

"And I'll be counted in, later in the prophecy," interposed Archie, good-humoredly, "that is, if you will allow *Lady Rose* to proceed."

"Well, here I am with my knight," resumed Rose, "and that is all for the first pane. As to the second, I don't quite make it out. It looks like a smooth firm road, and see how it sparkles," she added, as the setting sun shone out brightly, making the frosted pane almost blinding in its brilliancy.

"That's a golden sea," explained Charlie.

"Or a valley of diamonds," suggested Archie.

"Showing how bright your pathway will be," said Charlie, gallantly.

"Very well," continued Rose, "and after

the valley of diamonds, what is this? a forest?"

"No, a ship," cried Charlie. "See the spars and rigging!"

"But the masts are broken and the rigging torn away," said Harry. "That is a shipwreck, Rose. I wouldn't have those panes. Try the next."

"No, I must keep what I chose," said Rose with a shade of sadness on her bright girlish face. "A shipwreck, is it? And what comes next? People survive shipwrecks sometimes."

"Oh, certainly," laughed Charlie. "What would be the use of your own true knight, without perils from which he can rescue you? But the next is a blank!"

That was true. The frost had covered it entirely. Even the sun, now sinking, failed to illuminate it.

"A veil seems drawn over the rest of the story," said Rose, after a moment's silence. "Perhaps I perished in the shipwreck."

"But Archie," she resumed, presently, "you promised to come in later. Where are you?"

"Perhaps he went down with the rest of us in the wreck," said Charlie. "I see nothing that resembles you, Archie, unless it is this," laughingly touching the heavy oaken casement. "'Heart of oak,' you know," referring to some school-boy acts of bravery, that had won Archie this title.

Archie looked annoyed for a moment, but then his countenance cleared, and with the rare gentle smile that sometimes lighted up his whole face, he replied, "Very well, Charlie. Then, as the oaken frame-work protects all the panes, I suppose it is my lot to guard and protect you all. Even an oaken plank is sometimes welcome in a shipwreck, and a heart of oak may be as useful if not as ornamental as a glittering knight. Both now and then, I trust the *Lady Rose* will believe in my devotion."

A silence fell upon the little group. Rose stood with her eyes thoughtfully raised to the windows, as if seeking some further meaning in its fairy-like pictures, and even the irrepressible Charlie could find nothing to say.

Archie was the first to speak, as, taking up his hat, he declared it much later than he had supposed, and turned to make his adieu to Miss Chalmers.

Charlie accompanied him in his homeward walk, protesting however that it was

still early, and would not be dark for an hour.

Rose and Harry vanished to change their skating suits for more suitable dinner toils, and Miss Chalmers, rousing from a deep revery, slowly shook her head, saying, "It was very foolish in me! very foolish! I forgot they were nearly grown up. Rose past sixteen, and the boys older! Faithful knights and hearts of oak, and shipwrecks! Poor Rose!" and Miss Chalmers sighed as if somewhere in her life there had been diamond valleys and perhaps a shipwreck, with no oaken plank to rescue her happiness from drowning.

CHAPTER II.

THE VALLEY OF DIAMONDS.

Two years later, and Rose Chalmers was certainly in the midst of her valley of diamonds. A beauty and an heiress, with no mother, and an indulgent father, always too busy to pay any attention to his daughter, what wonder that Rose's head was nearly turned with the attentions and flatteries of other and younger men!

Chaperoned by her mother's sister, a gay, frivolous woman, Rose bade fair to develop into a mere butterfly of fashion.

Harry was at college, and his sister saw little of him, but there were occasional rumors of college pranks, not too creditable to those concerned.

Charlie Mannering was the most devoted of Rose's many admirers—perhaps the most favored. Ever at her side, he seemed likely to fulfil one part of the prophecy, and be indeed her true and faithful knight.

Of Archie she saw less, though he, like Charlie, was in the city, and both moved in the same circles. But Archie was in Mr. Chalmers's law office, and was a close student, seldom seen in the gay *salons* where Rose and Charlie passed so many pleasant hours. Always grave, he was now reserved almost to sternness; and Rose felt a slight awe of him, like her former wonder as to whether he considered her childish.

Perhaps he did so now, for his manner toward her, though always kind and with a sort of deference very different from Charlie's half-bantering devotion, still seemed that of one much her senior. "As if he were my grandfather," Rose said, poutingly.

And yet when both were present, it was for Archie's glance of approval that Rose cared. Of Charlie's indeed she was sure; all that she said and did seemed right in his sight, but in Archie's clear honest gaze, she sometimes read wonder or sorrow at some unusually gay sally or girlish flirtation, that even while she half resented it, guided her, and was remembered another time to keep her from a similar outburst.

Rose still retained the pretty title which the boys had given her years before. It seemed to suit her, for with all her gayety there was ever a gentle dignity in her manners, a graceful beauty that involuntarily reminded the beholders of her floral namesake.

It was a gay year for Rose. New York in the winter, Newport and Saratoga in the summer, with scarce a moment for serious thoughts or sober common sense.

"Don't you find the valley almost too bright and glittering sometimes?" asked Archie, one night toward the close of the season, when he had unexpectedly made his appearance at Saratoga, and was promenading with Rose after a waltz.

"Not a bit!" she answered, laughing at the allusion. "So you remember the prophecy! It used to make me quite blue to think of the shipwreck, but I have got over that now, and think my life will be one long diamond valley."

"And would you like this life always," asked Archie, with an earnest look. "So much show and glitter? No quiet sensible life? Nothing worth the living it seems to me; that is, for long. It does well enough occasionally, or for a short time when one is young!"

"Well, we are both young," said Charlie, who had overheard the last sentence, "and both bound to have a good time; so don't preach to her ladyship. Wait till the shipwreck, before you offer your ghostly consolation. Meanwhile, an' it please your ladyship, this is our dance," and he led Rose triumphantly away.

But Archie's grave questioning look haunted Rose, and she could not shake off the feeling of impending evil sufficiently to be quite her own glad self, in spite of Charlie's badinage. She did not believe Archie was generalizing! Had he ill news of Harry? She would see him in the morning, and ascertain what was wrong.

But in the morning it was Archie who requested an interview, and at the first glance Rose knew that her presentiment was not unfounded.

"What is it, Archie," she asked, as soon as he had said good-morning. "I can see that something is amiss. Is it about Harry? or papa?" she added, reading in his face that her first conjecture was wrong. "O Archie, is he ill, and you have waited all night without telling me!"

"I am the bearer of ill news, Lady Rose," answered Archie, as he gently forced her into a seat, "but you are mistaken as to its nature. I have not heard from Harry, and your father was quite well when I left him yesterday. I am the bearer of a message to you, and according to his instructions, as I could not arrive here until you were in the ball-room last night, I waited till this morning to deliver it."

"And it refers?" said Rose, trembling with a dread of she knew not what.

"To his business affairs, which have not been prosperous for some time. The failures of several firms with which he was much involved have brought matters to a crisis."

"But I thought papa was a lawyer," said Rose, in a perplexed tone.

"He is, and a most skillful one, but he is also engaged in many business speculations," replied Archie, gravely.

"And all his money gone?" asked Rose, after a short silence.

"He cannot tell yet, but fears that there will be little left, when all is settled," answered Archie. "He sent his dearest love to you, and begged you not to take matters too much to heart—that he was still strong and could work for and protect you."

"Poor papa!" was all Rose's reply; but Archie, who was watching her anxiously, saw a few quiet tears roll down her cheeks. Were they for herself or her father, he wondered.

Presently Rose said in a low, firm voice, "I must go to papa at once, and try to comfort him. When are you going? and can you take me with you?"

"Certainly," he replied, with a ring of cordial approval in his tones that went like a ray of sunlight to poor Rose's heart, "but Mr. Chalmers wished me to return by the

next train, and you could scarcely be ready so soon."

"Oh, yes, I can," said Rose, glancing at her watch. "There is an hour yet. I shall need only my bag. Aunt Helen can attend to my trunks afterward. If you will kindly excuse me now, I will meet you here in half an hour," and Rose left the room with a quiet womanliness that made Archie look after her with admiration, and mutter to himself, "A good true heart under all her fashionable folly. God help me to be a support to her and hers in this hour of trial."

Poor Rose bore up bravely under her aunt's hysterical reception of her news, and rejoined Archie with a look of gentle patience that went to his heart. But greater trials were in store for the young girl. On reaching home she found that her father had been seized that morning with an attack of paralysis, and was now lying in a very critical condition.

She had the one comfort of seeing that he recognized her, and that after she took her place by his bedside he ceased the piteous moaning, which the housekeeper told her he had made all that day, but that was all. No word of love could pass those poor distorted lips, nor could the bewildered brain comprehend the comfort she endeavored to speak.

Harry had gone on a walking tour with some college friends, and as no one knew his whereabouts he could not be summoned home.

Day and night Rose watched by her father, never leaving him save when Archie, who was as devoted as a son and brother could have been, insisted on taking her place, while she gained a little of the rest she so much needed. Her aunt had followed her back to New York, but with her nerves and hysterics was more of a hinderance than a help.

Mr. Chalmers sunk slowly but steadily, and died about two weeks after his failure. Harry had returned the night before his father's death, and Rose had to put aside her own grief to comfort him.

Archie was now invaluable. His clear common sense, and knowledge of business matters, combined with his kindness in trying to rouse Harry from his hopeless despondency, made Rose involuntarily turn to him as her only adviser and protector.

The poor girl retained her quiet usefulness till all was over, but a few days after

the funeral, Archie on entering the library was startled by sobs, and as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom of the darkened room, beheld a little black-robed figure flung upon the lounge in all the abandonment of grief.

"Lady Rose!" he exclaimed, stepping quickly forward, fearful of some new sorrow, but as she hastily raised her head, and, wiping her eyes, began to speak hurriedly upon some business matters, he made no further allusion to her distress, but sitting down, proceeded to explain the subject to which she had referred.

She evidently heard little of what he said however, and as he paused she said—as if any apology was needed, poor child—"You must not think me too foolish, Archie. Indeed, I do try not to yield to my sorrow, but just now, sitting here alone, a remembrance of that old prophecy came over me. It has been fulfilled so far, has it not? I had my diamond valley, and surely this is the shipwreck of all my hopes and happiness."

"But as you then said, one may survive a shipwreck," commenced Archie, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Yes, to find all their gay friends swept away, and only the blank future before them," responded Rose, sorrowfully.

Archie was silent. He knew, or believed he knew, to what she referred. Since the news of her father's failure not one word had been heard from Charlie Mannering, who still remained at Saratoga, the gayest of the gay.

"But these are early days yet," Archie began, presently, "and doubtless many, who really sympathize deeply with you, feel a delicacy in intruding on your sorrow."

"Don't, Archie!" broke in Rose, with more impatience than he had ever seen her manifest. "Don't try to make excuses for them. They are not worth it. I will not try to think of them again, but only to be thankful that you had no such false delicacy, or what would have become of us!"

Rose's voice was choked with sobs, and Archie was endeavoring to think of some suitable reply, when Harry entered, and the conversation turned upon their future arrangements.

CHAPTER IV.

A HEART OF OAK.

A few months had passed. Rose was

quietly settled with Miss Chalmers, who had received her orphan niece to her home with heart-felt welcome.

Harry, with Archie's help, was striving manfully to settle his father's affairs, and bade fair to become a steady business man.

The good reports which Archie made at every visit of Harry's energy and perseverance, were the greatest source of happiness in Rose's new life. The probability, that was now fast becoming a certainty, that a small competence would be saved from the wreck scarcely seemed to affect her, till Archie suggested that it would serve to establish Harry in business. Then, indeed, she grew earnest in the matter.

"Let the boy have it," said Miss Chalmers smilingly, when, some allusion having been made to Rose's share of the property, she started forward as if to disclaim it, but a sudden thought of her utter dependence on her aunt's occurring to her mind, she sank back in silence. "Let him have it, and may a blessing go with it. As for Rose, she is my daughter now. I have enough to make us both comfortable, and she need feel no dependence, for her love and companionship are worth far more than all I can give her."

Rose turned a grateful look upon her aunt, and Archie seemed to entirely agree with the good old lady.

Rose and Charlie had met occasionally on his visits to his home, but as mere acquaintances. Report declared him dancing attendance on an elderly heiress, and Rose had too much sense to bewail his loss, though she might sometimes remember the change with a smile and a sigh.

She was thus employed one bright winter's day, while standing by the latticed window, now once more covered with frost pictures, when she heard her sigh echoed, and turning saw Archie, who had entered unperceived, and who now stood watching her with some anxiety.

"Were you recalling the prophecy once again, Lady Rose?" he asked, rather sadly, for of late he had hoped she was forgetting the past, and becoming her old bright self once more.

"Yes," she replied, "recalling it, and remembering, with a thankfulness that I have never been able to express, the heart of oak that has so bravely guarded and protected both my brother and myself through all our trouble."

**“And who will gladly continue a protector
if he may,” whispered Archie, as he drew
the fair girl toward him.**

**And there was no look that forbade him
in the violet eyes now raised to his full of
happy tears.**



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